

SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS WITHIN THE ARMY
DURING THE INDIAN WARS
(1865-1881)

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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B.A., Methodist College, Fayetteville, North Carolina, 1986

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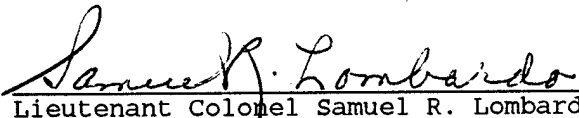
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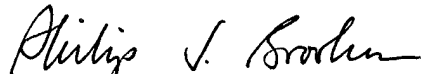
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ABSTRACT

SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS WITHIN THE ARMY DURING THE INDIAN WARS (1865-1881) by
Major Alan T. Mabry, USA, 85 pages.

This study investigates the Army's post-Civil War systemic problems during the Indian Wars within the time frame from 1865 to 1881. It examines the areas of leadership, doctrine, training, and equipment. The study considers the Sioux Indians and their allies along with Indians who supported the Army during its campaigns in the West. With the Civil War now in the past, the Army appeared to be in a position to annihilate the Indians. The Indian Wars, however, lasted for three decades. This effort focuses on the reasons for the Army's inability to quickly end conflict with a foe lesser in size and equipment.

Problems in the present Army compare to the Army of 1865. After the Civil War, drastic force reductions occurred as seen in recent years. The Army in 1865 had problems adjusting its doctrine and resources to contend with new and smaller adversaries. Very similar difficulties today are the source of complaint by modern leaders. Post-Civil War struggles with doctrine, training the force, force structure, and leadership are clearly challenges the Army faces today. This study, therefore, additionally intends to draw parallels which provide lessons learned for consideration by current leaders.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the period following the Civil War the Army faced three major tasks: occupying the former Confederacy, defending its force structure from a Congress desperate for a reduced military, and reestablishing its presence on the western frontier.¹ The first two tasks took away resources from the third, which is the subject of this thesis.

To establish its presence on the frontier, the Army had to police a six-thousand square mile frontier along a line stretching from Canada to Mexico. The Army would eventually be successful and subdue the American West. However, the cost would be high in men and material. The frontier soldiers did not complete their final operation and fight the last Indian battle until 29 December 1890. The reasons for the protracted struggle, and the lack of tactical success, are numerous. Many of the difficulties were systemic within the Army itself, and hindered mission accomplishment. The most significant difficulties were in the areas of doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment. These deficiencies were evident throughout the American Indian Wars from 1865 to 1881. Their effect on mission accomplishment was most prevalent in the conduct of the 1866 Bozeman Trail War and the 1876 Centennial Campaign.

The Army which moved to the West after the Civil War was in a period of change. The infantry was the predominate combat arm in the American Civil War. In the Indian Wars the infantry would still play a significant role, but now the cavalry was essential to the subsistence of the Army against its new adversary. Additionally, the government felt no need for a large standing force to control the West and the Indians living there. The government was stingy with the emplacements of war, but reasonably generous with the tools of peace. The Army in the West dwindled to twenty-five thousand men fighting a quarter of a million Indians. Their leaders were combat veterans who had won the biggest war to date in the United States. They now had to face a challenge vastly different from their Civil War experience. In addition to the Indian threat they also had secondary missions of settling the West; setting up sawmills, building roads, and showing the settlers that crops could grow in the harsh environment.

It is important to take a look at this particular period and its problems because of its similarity to our era and how it compares with today's Army and the problems of down-sizing. With the downfall of the Soviet Union we have no other super power to deter. The environment of the world has changed. We now see small societies with big problems that could cause numerous difficulties for the US Government. A study of the American Indian Wars could lend some insights for future planners and help them avoid the stumbling blocks of others before them.

A knowledge of the problems the Army encountered during this period could enlighten future leaders. The differences in the style of warfare and the Indians outlook of war are noteworthy. Despite these

differences, the Army did not change their doctrine or tactics for several years. The Army looked down on leaders who changed their method of fighting and used unorthodox styles. This can possibly relate to today's Army and its possible enemies who do not fight similar to ourselves.

The post-Civil War Army was coming from a major war as victors and felt they knew how to defeat anyone. They became content they had mastered the art of war and had little to learn fighting a new adversary, the plains Indians. This attitude is seen when the Army recruited Kit Carson. Many felt he violated the traditional mold. "He had had no particular affinity for spit-and-polish, nor was he a commander who fought by the book."² Their attitude towards frontiersmen and the American Indian soon changed.

There was a lack of support from the government as seen in a remark by Secretary of War William C. Endicott:

The Army has but little opportunity for active service and what it has not the most agreeable or inspiring kind. The control of the Indians, difficult and hazardous as it is, is yet war on a very limited scale and bears but slight resemblance to the great contests which follow the collision between nations.³

The support of the people was also in question. Americans of the period did not feel compelled to feed and pay soldiers when there was no fighting or perceived significant threat.⁴ The American people did not feel they were at war with the Indians. The Indian Wars were only significant to that small number of people who lived in the undeveloped West. All of this changed as newspapers drew attention to the problems white settlers were having with the Indians along with the Army's difficulty in solving these problems.

The post-Civil War was a period in which the Army should have been at its peak. The Indians were at the final stages of existence as

nations, but the Army still could not bring to closure the Indian problems for a period of three decades. The Army adjusted poorly to a new environment and a new threat.

Serious systemic problems in the areas of doctrine, training, leadership, and equipment contributed to the Indian Wars being long and costly. The Bozeman Trail Wars and the Centennial Campaign demonstrate how the Army dealt with these problems. This study gives today's Army leaders' lessons learned for handling the constraints of doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment during a period of down-sizing and budget constraints.

Endnotes

¹James W. Shufelt Jr, Operational Art In The Sioux War of 1876, (Fort Leavenworth: Government Printing Office, 1993), 7.

²United States Adjutant General's Office. Chronological List of Actions, etc., with Indians from Jan. 1 1866, to Jan. 1891.

³Russell F. Weigley, "The Long Death of the Indian-Fighting Army," ed Garry D. Ryan and Timothy K. Nenniger, Soldiers and Civilians: The U.S. Army and the American People, (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1991), 987.

⁴Thomas W. Dunlay, Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the U.S. Army the Trans-Mississippi West, 1860-1890, (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1980) 73-4.

CHAPTER 2

BOZEMAN TRAIL WARS

During the period between the Civil War and the closing of the Bozeman Trail in late 1868, the Army experienced significant changes. These changes took form in several areas. As an example, the total troop strength was cut from over a million to a mere twenty-five thousand scattered from Maryland to California due to the act of 1866. Additionally, lack of resources and budget constraints changed the way the Army did business. Political bureaucrats in Washington now ran the Army. It is essential to analyze these changes to identify the reasons why the Army was not as successful as it could have been during this time.

The use of the Bozeman Trail gave a clear picture of the post-Civil War Army due to the relative nearness to the end of the war. This campaign demonstrates problems in all areas with an unusual outcome of the Army leaving the area and bestowing the land to the Sioux. The battles of Massacre Ridge, Hayfield, and Wagon Box provide lessons learned for everything from victory to defeats. Each reveals problems within the Army's war-fighting capabilities.

Gold discoveries in Montana caused the Northwest to become the first major area people migrated to after the Civil War. During the period 1866 to 1868 the Northwest illustrates the appearance of the post-Civil War West, including the Army, its equipment, and the Indians. It gives the reader a reference point for understanding the Army's

problems settling the West and what they did to overcome them. From 1866 to 1868, the Army fought and lost a war with the Sioux Nation concerning the rights of travel along the Bozeman Trail. This defeat was a direct result of the systematic problems within the Army.

During the Civil War, the nation was primarily concerned with events in the East. The frontier was secondary, with very few people traveling West. Given small numbers of migrating settlers, the plains Indians had little exposure to the white man. A few days after the Civil War ended but before Jefferson Davis, the Confederate President, knew of Lee's surrender, the Confederacy made a treaty with numerous Indian tribes. Davis persuaded twenty thousand Indians to accept peace terms.¹ This peace was short-lived as the end of the war began a new migration.

The post-Civil War Army consisted of Confederate and Union soldiers; German, Irish, French, and Italian immigrants; Indian scouts from several different tribes, and others who could not handle civilian life. They resembled a Foreign Legion bound together primarily by a mutual desire to survive their enlistment and an ignorance of their adversary, the American Plains Indian.

Soldiers appearance also changed. Mustaches replaced beards which disappeared due to the severe heat and cold of the West. Uniforms likewise began to change. Troops discarded most of their gear and basically wore what they wanted. However, the men were hard-working, rough, and flamboyant fighters. When not fighting Indians, soldiers fought each other.

They were not particularly fond of political leadership in the East and did not feel their mission was to fight Indians. Army leaders believed they were there to protect the routes of migrants and tradesmen. The soldiers were not there to specifically execute a war against the Indians. Their mission was to enforce Federal law in the territories and protect the lives and property of citizens.²

Western Army commanders constantly received conflicting directions from government politicians who usually had never been in the West. It further appeared that Washington did not have a grasp of the situation when the government ordered Colonel Henry B. Carrington to fire Jim Bridger, a key Indian scout and interpreter, to save five dollars a day. The Colonel recognized the need for such experience to provide advice and communicate with the Indians. He wisely decided to report that the discharge was "impossible to execute."³

This type of mishandling of Indian policy usually started conflicts with the Indians. A typical example was the meeting that General William T. Sherman held with the Indian chiefs in June of 1866. The Indians discovered during the encounter that the Army was going ahead with moving troops along the Bozeman Trail without waiting for their permission. It became obvious that the Army was going to build forts along the Bozeman in an area already given to the Indians by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. Such disdain for the Indians resulted in countless battles. This particular incident left the Indians little recourse but to fight.

The Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahos, Blackfeet, Gros Ventres, and Crow lived along the Bozeman trail in an area called Absaraka, "Home of

the Crows." The Crows were peaceful and claimed "never to have killed a white man but in self-defense."⁴ Although the Crows had claim to the land, they were not ruling the area. The Sioux and Cheyenne told the Army they seized the land because the Crows would not share it.

The major adversary of the Army during this time was Red Cloud, Chief of the Oglalas. He was chief over both the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes and spoke for most other tribes in that area. "He was physically magnificent, proud in bearing, a natural leader, hardly to be distinguished from the white commanders in speech and manners. Later he would prove to be a military strategist of undoubted genius."⁵

Red Cloud gathered as many bands and clans together as he could, putting aside differences and organizing all into a common effort to drive the whites from the area. He recognized they could neither fight the Army man to man nor attack the forts without severe losses. He believed the best way to achieve success was a war of attrition. He would fight only when odds were in his favor and disperse any livestock that could be easily taken.

The Indians were still using the bow and arrow, a more powerful weapon than the revolver and faster reloading than the rifle. The Indians did have some rifles but did not use them as well as the soldiers did. They used them primarily at close range with rapid firing for shock effect during charges. They also used lances, knives, and hatchets when fighting hand-to-hand.

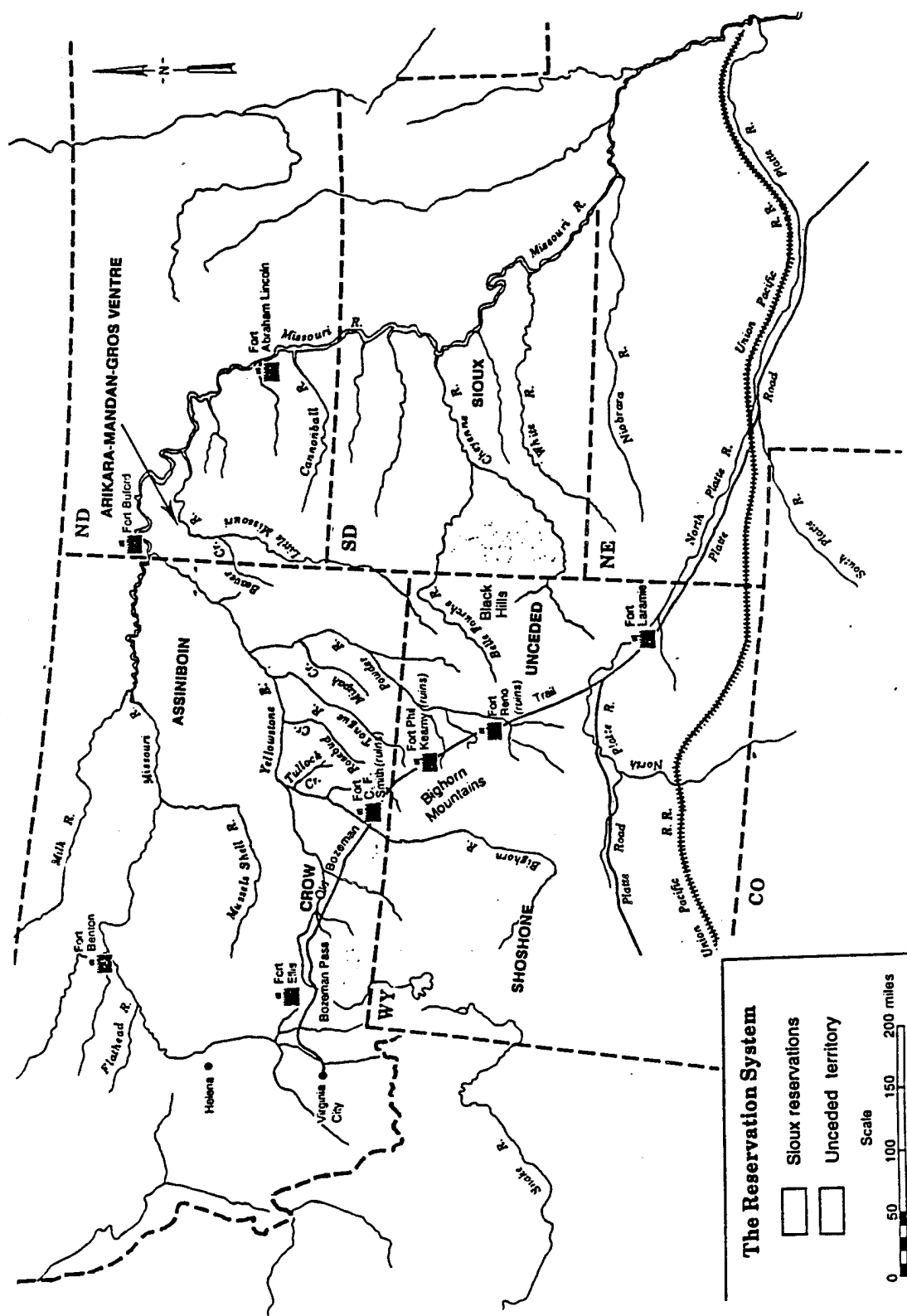
Another area in which the Indian differed from whites was their use of ponies. Horses were a way life in the West. One could not travel the vast area without them. The Indians had sure-footed ponies

that were swift when compared to the larger and slower horses of the Army. Indians, on their small ponies, could quickly dart about surprising the soldiers and retreating before anyone reacted.

The Indians knew that they could not stop the migrating whites, but felt they had to try maintaining their way of life. They understood that eventually they would not be able to hold the land, but were unsure as to what the future held if they gave it away. Given these thoughts, the Indians decided to fight for as long as possible and let the future come as it would.

Several trails led the pioneers West. The Oregon, Santa Fe, and National were popular; however, a less known, but equally deserving of a place in history was the Bozeman. The Bozeman Trail was known by many names during its short, but exciting existence: the Bozeman Cutoff, Montana Road, Fort Reno Road, the Virginia City Road, and the Bloody Bozeman (see fig. 1). The Bozeman was blazed after the discovery of gold in Western Montana. John Bozeman, a Georgian newly arrived to the West, and John Jacob, a veteran mountain man, marked the trail in 1863, but it only lasted six years. It started at the North Platte River in Wyoming and went Northwest through Montana to a place called Hellgate.

Traveling the Bozeman Trail necessitated only one crossing of the Continental Divide while migrating West, which shortened the route to the rich gold fields in Montana by over 400 miles. Other routes required numerous zigzag crossings by the wagon trains and took significantly longer to travel.⁶ Along the route the Army established three forts. They were Reno (formerly known as Fort Connor), Phil Kearny located at the forks of the Piney Creek, and C. F. Smith in



Montana, isolated on the Bighorn River. The Indians destroyed the forts when the Army abandoned them after a peace treaty returned the area to the Indians.

Since it was dangerous to travel, the trail lived up to the name "Bloody Bozeman." The Sioux considered this area their sacred hunting ground with the white man often the one being hunted. This was not only sacred hunting ground, it was also their last hunting ground. The area was magnificent game country that held elk, sheep, antelope, two kinds of deer, rabbit, sage hen, prairie chicken, water birds, grizzly, cinnamon bear, wolves, beaver, and tens of thousands of buffalo. The Indians gathered food and pelts here to make their clothing. Giving up this land would be equivalent to giving up their freedom.

On 13 July 1866, Colonel Carrington selected the site for Fort Phil Kearny, just south of the point where the Bozeman Trail crossed Big Piney Creek. The placement of the fort gave the men easy access to wood for their fires and building materials along with grass for the livestock. The soldiers worked tirelessly clearing trees and converting it to lumber in order to build fortifications before winter set in.

The fort had serious leadership problems. Three of the key leaders, Captains Frederick Brown and William J. Fetterman, and Lieutenant George Grummond were seasoned combat veterans. However, all of their combat experience was in the Civil War, and they knew little of the Indian way of war. They also knew that Colonel Carrington had served primarily in administrative positions and had no combat experience. Fetterman was a brevet Lieutenant Colonel during the Civil

War. He did not feel the same way about the Indians as Carrington did. The colonel was a cautious man where Fetterman was aggressive. Fetterman had only recently arrived in the West and had no respect for his Indian adversaries, he believed his Civil War veterans could easily defeat them in battle. Captain Fetterman stated to Jim Bridger that he and eighty men could end the Indian problems. Bridger warned Carrington that Fetterman and the other officers were crazy and did not know anything about Indian fighting.⁷

The Indians were constantly watching and waiting for opportunities. One of their chiefs, Red Cloud, unlike other Indian chiefs, made long-range plans. He was also a strong enough leader to keep the younger braves in check. He even held a briefing with his warriors the day before the massacre to review his plans. It was his plan to lure parties from the fort and draw them into a trap. He discovered during earlier raids on Army livestock that soldiers would give pursuit and felt that given the right circumstances he could take advantage of this pattern. Only two weeks before the Fetterman Massacre Red Cloud's Sioux had lured a relief column beyond the nearby Lodge Trail Ridge, nearly destroying it.

On 21 December 1866, a battle occurred that shocked the entire nation. Although called the Fetterman Massacre, it was not a true massacre but, more precisely, a fight between two armed forces with one being totally annihilated. The command dispatched a wood train on the morning of 21 December as it did every day. When it came under attack, Colonel Carrington ordered an immediate rescue party led by Captain James Powell. Fetterman insisted he lead the rescue because he was

senior to Powell. Carrington grudgingly obliged and ordered Fetterman to relieve the wood train and return while avoiding decisive engagement or crossing the Lodge Trail Ridge.

Captain Fetterman took seventy-six soldiers, two officers, and two civilians with him; the exact same number with which he had earlier boasted he could solve the Indian problems. It is still being debated whether Fetterman followed Carrington's orders or decided to disregard from the beginning, although it is clear that he did violate Carrington's order not to cross Lodge Trail Ridge.⁸ This proved to be a disaster for the entire party as Fetterman took his group into difficult terrain. The Indian decoys, led by a young warrior named Crazy Horse, feigned giving ground which caused the inexperienced Fetterman to give pursuit. Fetterman was unaware that there were approximately two-thousand Indians waiting in ambush. As Fetterman's force started down a ridge, the Indians attacked killing and mutilating all eighty-one men. The rescue party later concluded that Captains Fetterman and Brown saw they were not going to survive and decided to shoot themselves rather than risk capture and torture.⁹ Official medical reports confirmed only Captain Brown shot himself, while Fetterman was probably killed by Indians. The hill, covered with snow and frozen blood, was later named Massacre Hill.

When Colonel Carrington heard the shooting from Captain Fetterman's party, he quickly organized a rescue party but it arrived too late. It took two days to haul the bodies back to the fort. Sending out a party to retrieve the bodies and leaving the fort undermanned became a major point of concern.

This action made Carrington reassess his precarious position. He now believed that the Indians could easily destroy the fort. He anticipated the worst and prepared the fort for a last stand by placing explosives in the powder magazine where the women would go if attacked. He did not want to leave anything in the event they were completely over-taken by the Indians.

The weather and a heroic ride by John "Portugee" Phillips were believed to have saved the fort. Phillips departed Fort Phil Kearny and rode more than 200 miles to Fort Laramie in sub-zero weather while avoiding capture by the Indians. The Army at Fort Laramie sent help that reached Fort Phil Kearny before Red Cloud could attack. The Army did not forget Phillips' ride; they gave him a three-hundred dollar reward. The Indians did not forget either. They raided his cattle for years after this event.

The Army blamed Carrington for the disaster and relieved him. Nevertheless, they complied with Carrington's request for everything from men to ammunition to new rifles. This helped the forts along the Bozeman and setup the Army for success in the next major battles. Leadership in Washington learned that there really was an Indian problem and to solve it they would need to dedicate more funding to sustain the forts.

In August of 1867, the Indians again saw an opportunity to strike another blow against the Army. They fully expected to duplicate the Fetterman incident. Red Cloud decided to plan a coordinated attack at two separate locations to destroy the garrisons at Forts C. F. Smith

and Phil Kearny.¹⁰ There was, however, a different outcome to these particular battles.

Seeing a vulnerability, over five hundred Indians attacked thirty civilian hay cutters and soldier guards working over two miles from Fort C. F. Smith on 1 August 1867. This time, however, the Army was prepared to fight. Lieutenant Sigismund Sternmund, the detachment commander, was a Prussian who had fought in the Civil War. He, too, had his own ideas on how to fight Indians, but his ideas were no more successful than Captain Fetterman's. As the Indians attacked, he ordered his men to stand-up and fight. He stood up to set the example but was shot in the head. The others concealed themselves behind a string of logs and green willow branches making up the perimeter of the corral. They fought valiantly against superior forces even after the Indians set fire to the hay. The blaze moved towards the corral and came within twenty feet of the defenders before it died down.¹¹

Captain Edward S. Hartz, who was in charge of a wood train, observed the smoke from the fire and, using his field glasses, saw the Indians attacking. He rushed to the fort to inform its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Luther P. Bradley. Bradley ordered everyone into the fort and closed the gates refusing to send help. Without help, the defenders in the corral held off numerous attacks for over six hours. Finally, sunset brought relief in the form of the company on patrol. An accountability revealed two dead and three wounded. One of the wounded, a civilian, later died after unsuccessful surgery.

Although the battle had a favorable outcome, it did little for military-civilian relations at the fort. Many civilians and soldiers were bitter that the Bradley sent no reinforcements to assist them. If

the company on patrol had not found them, they would not have received any relief.

This battle demonstrated that troops could survive Indian attacks, if on the defense. It further showed the Army was vulnerable while in small numbers. Unless the government supplied additional troops, they could expect more attempts by the Indians to cut them off from the forts and possibly destroy them. The Indians did not perceive the Army as a threat given the performance of the soldiers during this fight. They did learn the Army was now prepared to deal with the Indians, though still on the Indians' terms.

On 2 August 1867, the day after the Hayfield Fight, the Indians attacked a wood train outside Fort Kearny. Red Cloud and American Horse brought several hundred braves for this fight, envisioning a slaughter to match the Fetterman Fight.

When the wood cutters saw the advancing Indians, they picked up their weapons and safely proceeded to the fort. This was exactly what Red Cloud wanted. The difference this time was leadership. Captain James Powell, the same officer who was to lead the relief on 22 December, was not like the rash Fetterman. He respected the Indian fighting capabilities and had carefully planned for a deliberate defense. He rushed thirty-one soldiers and civilians to a make-shift fort built from fourteen wagon beds reinforced with grain sacks, logs, and sandbags. Configured in a circle, the position additionally contained extra weapons and ammunition. Some of the rifles were the newer repeating Spencers and Winchesters owned by individuals.¹² Powell gave his best sharpshooters' three of the repeating rifles each and the rest kept the fairly accurate Springfield-Allin conversion

breechloaders. He had the group hold their fire until the Indians were approximately fifty yards away (see figure 2).

When the defenders opened fire they totally eliminated the first line of Indians. Several witnesses stated that never had so many Sioux been killed in such a short period of time.¹³ However, the Indians continued the attack for a period of four hours. During this time the soldiers had a reloading relay to facilitate a faster firing rate. The Indians could not understand how a few soldiers were able to sustain the high rate of fire. They finally departed, leaving their dead, after a relief party fired a mountain howitzer which dispersed the surprised Indians. A reliable estimate of Indian casualties was sixty dead and one hundred wounded. Powell's losses were only three dead and two wounded. He later recounted that it could have ended in a disaster. Little ammunition was remaining when their reinforcements arrived, driving off the remaining Indians.

Red Cloud observed the entire battle. He saw the massive firepower with its tragic and demoralizing results, and departed pondering the fate of all Indians. He realized their days were few. This did not stop his future assaults on the whites, but it did change his way of fighting.

The Wagon Box Fight confirmed that the Army needed more soldiers to control the West. The Indians exhibited the ability to mass large numbers and coordinate attacks. The Army could only react to the Indians. Without additional support, it could not defend people and property in the West. The Indians were in charge, attacking weaknesses anywhere in the area. These problems forced the federal government to

make a decision: pour more soldiers into the West and raise spending, or give up the area to the Indians.

The eastern press now became interested in the Indian Wars. Recent battles drew much attention. The American people increasingly demanded a peaceful settlement. They considered the Indian Wars too expensive and difficult. Apparently the Army could only win the small defensive engagements. There were not enough forces along the Bozeman trail to conduct offensive operations. They barely had enough men and equipment to defend themselves, let alone citizens traveling along the trail.

The military strategic solution which evolved was to restrict Indian movement. The Army needed a way to move and contain them. The politicians viewed reservations as the way to do this. They believed giving Indians the land on reservations would possibly appease them. This resulted in a return to the peace treaty method of dealing with Indian problems. It also meant going back to bargaining with the Indians instead of trying to force them into submission.

The Army made several attempts to bring Red Cloud to the peace commissions. He refused to attend, sending word to the commission that he would stop fighting only when he no longer had to defend his people's hunting grounds. This caused General U. S. Grant to write General W. T. Sherman in March of 1868, suggesting they close the Bozeman Trail and all three forts. In August, the Treaty Commission under the direction of Congress closed the forts to the total astonishment of the soldiers stationed there. They wondered why they worked so hard to build forts and sacrifice so many only to abandon everything. This became a major

contention for most soldiers who lost all faith in the leadership back East.¹⁴

When the soldiers departed, the Indians moved in and quickly destroyed everything left behind. The troops could see over their shoulders huge black clouds billowing from the site which were once were their homes. Yet, Red Cloud still waited until 8 November 1868, after the fall hunt, to sign the peace treaty. He saw this as a victory, but held no illusions regarding the way things were going to end. He was right; arrangements agreed to in the treaty were soon ignored by the whites.

This meant the Indians won this battle, but both sides knew it would not be the end of the conflicts. The Army had to change how it fought a new kind of enemy. Small numbers residing in forts was no longer effective. The Indians would never attack a stronghold; he attacked only weakened points, such as the settlers, small wagon trains, and small detachments of soldiers when the situation was right for a victory. The Indians realized that the restoration of their land with the departure of the whites was only a temporary reprieve. Whites continued to move West, forcing the Indians into smaller and smaller areas.

Army leadership learned several lessons during this period of time. With the end of the Civil War, the commitment to equip and maintain an Army was not a concern to most. Only those traveling west needed the services of the Army. The opinion of common citizens about soldiers deteriorated. The image of the Army and esteem for soldiers was low. In the East there were even signs which said "soldiers and dogs not welcome."

The Army failed to adjust its doctrine to the Indian ways of war. The soldiers thought their assignment to the West was to help settle the area, bring peace to the West, but not to make war again. They performed numerous duties leaving little time to train for war-fighting. With distracters like building forts, carrying mail, and performing escort duties, they had to constantly adapt their normal Army routines. The missions of training, drilling, and other normal soldierly duties were relegated in order to perform the daily routines of running the forts.

During this time the Army changed its fighting tactics. However, doctrine did not reflect these changes made in the field. As earlier stated, most officers would employ techniques used during the Civil War. The Indian did not fight like the white man. Indians were more mobile and avoided force on force unless the odds were in their favor. Instead, they used hit and run tactics.

At the top of the leadership in Washington was a division between the hawks and doves. The doves were from the Department of Interior and had the task of resolving Indian problems. People in the East called them "Indian friends." Doves believed that if you treated Indians with kindness they would settle down to be happy and industrious farmers. Since Indians were not asked what they wanted, this theory had faults. If asked, the Indians would have responded that they wanted to be left alone.

On the other side of the issue were the hawks like Generals Grant and Sherman. They were from the War Department and desired to end Indian problems in a hurry with the use of force. The hawks saw things differently than the Doves. "The only good Indian was a dead Indian, kill every one over the age of twelve, and if enough could be killed the

rest would stay in line while living on a reservation."¹⁵ Most people considered high ranking officers and frontiersmen as hawks.

The doves and hawks would not work together. This could be seen by the earlier meeting with Red Cloud at Fort Laramie. One side sent troops to occupy the Bozeman Trail, and the other side asked for permission to use the trail at the exact same time.

The Army rank and file despised the policies of the Indian Peace Commissions. Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan, while the Commanding Officer of the Army's Department of the West, saw that the Indians could not be persuaded, and he believed force was necessary to make them change. He obtained assistance when his friend Ulysses Grant became President. They developed a plan for military action against the Indians. Knowing normal force on force would not work the generals opposed existing Army doctrine. They never recorded their opposition to pre-Civil War battle tactics, they just did what they believed was effective. These generals resolved the way to fight Indians was by a war of attrition, fighting as the Indian did, unrelentless pursuit, not giving the enemy a chance to attack anything.

To make this operational methodology work, the War Department initially decided not to use regular troops. Instead, the Army hired frontiersmen who had previously functioned as civilian scouts. After negotiating this course of action through normal bureaucratic red tape, the frontiersmen ended up being enlisted in the Quartermaster Corps. The War Department took this highly skilled group, issued them weapons and ammunition, and pressed them into service. They assigned these frontiersmen to the command of Major George A. Forsyth, who further developed Sheridan and Grant's plan. The frontiersmen decided to use their own horses, they were better than the Army's horses, and headed out after the Indians as instructed.

The new force of fifty former frontiersmen never got their chance as they were ambushed by over six-hundred Indians. They battled well for three days and killed the great Cheyenne warrior, Roman Nose in what would later be known as the battle of Beecher Island. Forsyth lost thirty-five soldiers while killing and wounding over one-hundred Indians.¹⁶

Lacking quality frontiersmen for replacements, this experimental force was not used again. Albeit, their short history taught the Army to make its forces more mobile. Accordingly, Army Headquarters ordered forts to form mobile patrols using cavalry. This was a change from the doctrine of employing foot soldiers. Still, this change was not recorded. Previously, units departed the forts only to conduct raids or protect wagon trains. Patrolling to keep an eye on Indians now became an additional mission.

The terrain and enemy forced these changes. Army leadership saw they could not execute the same doctrine used during the Civil War. Although the Army did not develop long range plans or methods to solve the problems, it did pursue change.

The War Department did not have a grip on what was happening out West. They were slow to react to requests and recommendations. People in the eastern United States were not interested in the West, so politicians catered to the whims of eastern voters who decided their careers.

As previously discussed, western leaders had experience, but not the type needed to fight Indians. Lieutenant George W. Grummond, a Brevet Captain at the start of the Civil War, became a breveted Brigadier General for his gallantry and meritorious service during the Battle of Bentonville, North Carolina. After the war he became a Second Lieutenant in the Regular Army with other leaders like Captain Fetterman

who thought they knew how to fight Indians. Civil War experience and fighting the Indians in the West was two different things. Leaders who were adaptive rather than experienced survived with greater success. Kit Carson and Jim Bridger were among this type of leaders.

Quite often senior leaders out West did not know what the situation was in their own areas. They did not have enough men to perform daily patrols. Without adequate intelligence, commanders dispatched wagon trains with few or no escorts believing there were no Indians to worry about. Too frequently they found the wagon train completely destroyed a few days later and only several miles from the fort.

Often leaders would unjustly come under attack from their superiors. This is seen with the relief of Colonel Carrington. After his relief, the Army supplied the forts with exactly what Carrington requested to keep his fort protected. Another incident involved Colonel Carrington's decision not to attack the Indians during their first winter at Fort Kearny. His superiors questioned his judgment, not understanding the reason for the Colonel's decision. Colonel Carrington believed any attack would have encountered thousands of Indians wintering together.

Problems with superiors in the East and the lack of qualified leaders in the West resulted in numerous desertions. There were cases where Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) persuaded other personnel to desert.¹⁷ These soldiers lost faith in their leadership and saw leaving as the only way to escape being killed.

When General William Hazen, acting as what is known today as the Inspector General, came to inspect, he observed the forts in disarray. He saw soldiers living in small bunk houses or tents instead of the barracks normally seen at other forts. He found all the forts

ineptly managed and containing untrained soldiers without enough of the proper equipment.

General Hazen ascertained that the problem with timely reporting was due to poor leadership. Also, during this trip he had not seen Indians attacking forts or mail carriers and assumed Indians were not a problem. He concluded that the Indian problems were exaggerated. As noted earlier, he even took several of the fort's soldiers and horses to tour the area. He felt Carrington had not communicated enough with the Indians in order to settle existing problems.¹⁸

It was only later, and after several disasters, that Carrington's superiors realized they did have a serious problem. They discovered the Indians formally organizing and unwilling to give up the Bozeman area without a fight. Army leadership finally conceded and made peace with the Indians on their terms, at least for the time being.

The Civil War troops trained force on force mainly for dismounted engagements. Very few had experience with horses or fighting Indians and even fewer had been West. The Army was still mostly infantry. Post-Civil War troops thought they knew how to fight anyone, anywhere. Indians, though, did not fight like the Army trained.

During the Civil War, combatants had a sense of chivalry. The Indians had no such code. They trained from birth to fight for survival. Army training before and during the Civil War was not the same. After hostilities, soldiers could go home to continue living relatively the same as before. The Indians did not have anywhere to go. Their home was the place the white man was trying take and make his as a passage-way to the West. The Indians had conceded the entire East and all the hunting grounds in the West except the area along the Bozeman trail. They were making their last major effort to preserve the only way of life they knew. They would use any and every means to survive.

Civil War veterans were sometimes more of a problem than those who had not been in the war. New soldiers were usually willing to learn. Veterans had to be retrained to fight a different foe. Almost all officers served in the Civil War and needed to learn about their new adversaries. Like Fetterman, they thought they should be able to eliminate the Indians with a handful of skilled soldiers.

After the Civil War, many lower ranking soldiers returned to civilian life. Tired of soldiering, they saw no glory waiting in the future. Those still in service were there because their enlistments had not ended. They did as little as possible, waiting for their terms to end and return home. This attitude made training difficult for the leaders.

The new recruits arrived virtually untrained, having never fired their weapons or ridden a horse. The Army assigned some of these untrained soldiers to cavalry units and sent them directly to the forts.¹⁹ When they arrived at their new assignments, they did not receive a training period. They basically learned from on-the-job experience.

These and other problems made the forts unattractive assignments. Soldiers seldom had any facilities when they arrived. They had to build everything. This meant trying to build something to live in before winter. They also needed to build fortifications to protect themselves from the Indians. The soldiers slept in tents for long periods of time until they could build bunk houses. Building tasks and related difficulties left little time for training.

Another training distracter was the myriad of other duties taking precedence over training. "Most of the green recruits who were kept so busy fortifying the place against Indians and getting ready for winter that they hadn't begun to learn how to be soldiers. They had no

drill, no bayonet practice, no target practice."²⁰ Even after the forts were built soldiers still had to do many other duties: planting crops, setting up saw mills, delivering mail, supplying themselves and the other forts, protecting wagon trains, and checking wagon trains for the proper number of wagons, people, and guns before wagon trains could move forward. Compounding the problem of their numerous duties was the constant shortage of personnel. This was a result of a poor personnel management system, a lack of soldiers volunteering for duty in the barren West, death from sickness and Indians, and a high desertion rate.

Another problem was the lack of ammunition. So serious was the shortfall of ammunition that every fort in the West went long periods without having any target practice. Some new recruits never fired their weapons until an Indian uprising occurred.

Forts placed markers to display the effective ranges of both the howitzers and rifles to instruct soldiers when to fire and avoid wasting ammunition. Ammunition was always extremely scarce and soldiers were not permitted target practice during the period the forts were along the Bozeman Trail.²¹

The lack of training demonstrated that the Army was not prepared to fight its new adversary. Without practice soldiers did not respond as expected. Leaders were unsure of what their soldiers were capable of accomplishing. Further, they could not identify strengths or weaknesses until committed to actual combat. This put commanders under pressure to not only direct but observe, learn, and teach while in battle with an adversary many had never seen fight before. This combination of problems diminished the bold and audacious leadership normally associated with winning battles.

With the lack of ammunition, the forts occasionally had less than a box of cartridges per man. At one point, Fort C. F. Smith had

fewer than ten rounds per man until resupplied. Colonel Carrington sent his wagons to Fort Laramie to pick up the one hundred-thousand rounds of rifle ammunition he had requested. When the wagons arrived, there was not even one thousand rounds available in the fort.

At Fort Phil Kearny they also had a problem with weapons. More than one-hundred of the available rifles were beyond repair by the fort's armorer.²² Most other forts had the same problem. Another problem was the type of rifle the army procured. Soldiers were still using muzzle-loaders. The Army had not bought repeating rifles and was just beginning to purchase some breech-loading weapons. The large debt from the Civil War and lack of interest from people living in the East caused funding to be all but eliminated completely. Many commands forwarded requests to procure repeating rifles but the War Department response was slow. Several repeating rifles did find their way into the Army. Most came from civilians or soldiers who picked them up after Indian raids. Some soldiers purchased repeating rifles themselves.

Yet, another common problem regarding rifles was the Army's faulty distribution plan. A cavalry soldier required a carbine, but was usually issued a long rifle that could not be reloaded when riding a horse. In one incident, sixty-five new cavalry recruits arrived at Fort Phil Kearny with long rifles that were muzzle loaders.²³

The Indians bought, stole, and traded for the new repeating weapons. In many instances they had better weapons than most Army units. On numerous occasions, after the Indians had disengaged from battle, individual soldiers kept the Indian's weapon because it was one of the new repeating rifles, better than the military single shot rifle.²⁴

The Army was always short of horses. The Indians constantly stole horses from the Army. Additionally, units misused them for other

jobs like carrying mail and escorting traveling dignitaries requiring both men and horses. On one such occasion General Hazen visited and required Fort Phil Kearny to provide twenty-six men and horses to support his tour of the other forts. In October of 1867, they had so many horses delivering mail, messages, and performing escort duties that only twenty-eight horses remained at Fort Kearny for emergencies. Most of them were not fit to be ridden any distance.²⁵

As discussed earlier, there was always a shortage of soldiers. At times there were not enough personnel to drive and escort the re-supply wagons. If they used men from the fort, no one would be left to guard it. It was a dilemma of no food or no protection at a fort susceptible to Indian attacks. The Indians knew this and constantly watched how many soldiers were present on any given day.

Still another problem was insufficient harsh weather equipment for the soldiers. The Army supplied boots made of cheap, thin leather. During the winter the men wrapped burlap around their feet to keep warm. The Army also issued woolen socks which during the summer caused raw and blistered feet. Only limited medical care was available, usually one ambulance per garrison, which was for all the soldiers, children, and women in the area.²⁶

This overall lack of equipment meant the Army was not prepared to battle the enemy or the elements. The lack of supplies, such as ammunition and horses, resulted in deficient training. The improper types of equipment created undue hardships for leaders and soldiers; they could not battle the enemy if they could not survive the weather. The overall problem was funds to procure the proper amount and types of equipment. The Army, despite its recent successes during small defensive actions, made no effort to equip the troops with any type of material to ensure successful operations in the West. The War

Department would have to fit the forces or accept the loss of lives as a result of a better equipped enemy. The bottom line was the Army could not fight both the War Department for proper equipment and the Indians prepared to live and die in the harsh environment.

Due to its inability to settle the area around the Bozeman Trail, Army leaders reconciled that diplomacy was the only solution. The Army had to sue for peace and return contested land back to the Indians. The solution was unpopular. As an outcome many officers studied the lessons learned and explored new technical and tactical methods to correct deficiencies.

Leadership was affected by these changes but the real problem started at the top in Washington. A division between the politicians over how to handle all Indian affairs created turbulence within the armed forces. Senior commanders working in the East were under pressure from the politicians. Requesting more of everything from a group attempting to down-size the Army placed these officers in a precarious position.

This was further exacerbated because leadership within the Army being top heavy. Many accepted demotions in rank to continue service. Officers accustomed to working with larger organizations now led small units. This created situations of second guessing their superiors. Another factor was a large number of NCOs who did not want to be stationed in the West, with several awaiting their enlistments to end. The majority had signed on for the Civil War which had concluded. Lastly, almost all leaders were inexperienced with fighting Indians, a foe completely different from their normal adversary.

These problems became more compounded with the difficulties concerning equipment. It was not the proper equipment for the area of the West. They did not have enough of almost everything due to the

rapid down-sizing and need to cut the budget. This meant using equipment from the Civil War, designed for fighting in the East and extensively on foot. The Army needed more rugged and mobile equipment to incorporate necessary changes in its fighting methods.

These changes and new adversary forced Army commanders to make more systemic revisions to tactics, methods, and soldier support systems. This period within the Army was one of great turmoil, much like our Army today. Lessons learned during that period could help future leaders avoid mistakes of the past.

Endnotes

Endnotes

¹John Trebbel, The Compact History of the Indian Wars, (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc. 1966), 220. Jefferson Davis sent a Creek brave among the Osages, Pawnees, Iowas, Kickapoos, Potawatomes, Wichitas, Kiowas, Commanches, Apaches, Northern and Southern Cheyenne, Arapahoes, Navajos, Mescalero Apaches, Unkapas, Teton and Yankton Sioux to come to council on the Washita River, May, 1, 1865.

²Margaret Irvin Carrington, Absaraka: Home of the Crows, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 33.

³Frances C. Carrington, My Army Life, (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 128.

⁴Carrington, Margaret, 16.

⁵Trebbel, 223.

⁶Carrington, Margaret, 15.

⁷Dorothy M. Johnson, The Bloody Bozeman, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Inc., 1971), 231.

⁸Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Dr. Jerold Brown, Major William M. Campsey, and Major Scott R. McMeen, Atlas of the Sioux Wars (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1993), Map 5.

⁹Carrington, Margaret, 268.

¹⁰Maurice Malloff, Army Historical Series: American Military History (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), 307.

¹¹J. W. Vaughn, Indian Fights New Facts on Seven Encounters, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 102.

¹²Richard H. Dillon, North American Indian Wars, (New York: Bison Books, 1983), 163.

¹³Ibid., 162.

¹⁴Trebbel, 237.

¹⁵Dee Brown, Fort Phil Kearny, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), 14.

¹⁶Dillon, 165-7.

¹⁷Carrington, Margaret, 108.

¹⁸Johnson, 199.

¹⁹Brown, 23.

²⁰J. W. Vaughn, Indian Fights: New Facts on Seven Encounters, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 25-28.

²¹Ibid.

²²Johnson, 224.

²³Carrington, Frances, 118.

²⁴Johnson, 271-2.

²⁵Carrington, Margaret, 135-136.

²⁶Johnson, 205.

CHAPTER 3

CENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

This chapter examines the Centennial Campaign. The Army fought the Centennial Campaign in basically the same area and against the same Indian tribes as the Bozeman Trail Wars. The appearance of the area, Army, and Indians, and how all clashed during the Centennial Campaign will be discussed. The discussion will concentrate on the lessons learned from Army and Indian encounters during the Bozeman Trail Wars and a comparison to three key battles in the Centennial Campaign: Powder River, Rosebud Creek, and Slim Buttes. Details of the most famous battle of the campaign, Battle of Little Big Horn, are not discussed given that the three identified battles provide sufficient information and the controversies surrounding Custer's last battle would distract from the focus of the chapter. The discussion will review continuing Army problems regarding mission accomplishment, methods of fighting, doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment.

The bottom line is the Indians will make significant changes in how they conduct war during the campaign. However, the Army will make very few changes. The Army leadership will conduct campaign planning based on three fundamental assumptions. First, they believed Indians would not fight against organized forces; in any situation no matter the number, when Indians met Army forces, they would run. Therefore, reconnaissance was not important. Second was the belief Indians would

never seek battle unless the soldiers were in the proximity of their villages. This meant scouts were only needed to find the enemy, not to protect the force and training was not significantly important. Third, the Army leadership was convinced the meager opposition the Indians normally offered would be greatly reduced during the winter when they would concentrate on survival. However, the Army could not take advantage of this because the equipment was not available nor sufficient organization to establish a campaign during the winter. Assumption one and two are significant because of the affect they have on equipping, training, and leading the force. Additionally, both assumptions proved to be wrong during the campaign.

The frontier Army and local civilians had numerous problems with the plains Indian tribes leading up to the Centennial Campaign. Many have written that the Indians were completely innocent and the U.S. Government was to blame for all problems. This revealed two shortcomings: it was fashionable to have the government take the blame for all Indian problems and second, many who wrote about this period were poor students of research and geography.¹ In 1874 Indian agents employed by the Interior Department filed several claims on Sioux attacks upon whites and other peaceful Indians. These attacks violated the Treaty of 1868, prohibiting Indians from molesting peaceful Indians and whites for the return of the land. Renegade Indians felt no responsibility to uphold this treaty. Recognizing this, peaceful Indians began asking for weapons to protect themselves and for hunting.

Food became a primary concern on reservations. Lieutenant Colonel Luther Bradly at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, reported the Sioux

suffered from lack of food on the reservations in the territory. Brigadier General George Crook, Commander of the Department of the Platte, sent word to his superior, Major General Philip Sheridan, warning the government that failure to adequately supply the agencies would compel the Indians to leave and join the hostiles.² These problems, compounded by the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, led the way for the next conflict.

Again, the search for precious metals were a problem for the Indians. The Black Hills were within the Indians' area of the Treaty of 1868. The Army could not control the whites entering the Black Hills and pressure from politicians to open the area forced President Grant to find a solution which appeased the voters. This forced Grant to use force against the Indians.

The Centennial Campaign, also known as the Sioux War of 1876 and Sitting Bull's War, occurred in the northwest plains. The territory included the Black Hills and the Big Horn Mountains of South Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana, and encompassed the area designated under the Indians under the treaty of 1868. Again, the major problem was gold and precious metals. The rush to prospect gold put President Ulysses S. Grant in a great dilemma. Frontier people pressured the government to seize the gold-bearing Black Hills despite legal treaty obligations. Grant, powerless to prevent thousands of gold prospectors from violating the law and raping the land, held several meetings with Indian tribes attempting to resolve the dilemma peacefully.³ The government offered the Indians six million dollars for the Black Hills; the Indians countered with a more realistic price tag of thirty million.⁴ Once

again the Indians told the government they would fight anyone trespassing on their lands.

The Sioux and Cheyenne Indians, approximately fifty thousand Indians including fifteentousand well-armed warriors with plenty of ammunition, through their actions declared war on the United States. Both tribes had leaders capable of engaging in war. Problems increased as more settlers entered the Black Hills. The Sioux conducted raids killing area farmers, travelers, and other Indians. With violations occurring daily, like the renegades, they felt no responsibility to uphold their part of the treaty. An ex-Confederate general, Dexter E. Clapp, a newly appointed Indian agent in 1874, reported Sioux problems on a Crow reservation. The Sioux killed nine, wounded ten, and confiscated horses, mules, and cattle in seventeen attacks on the Crow. Out of necessity, the Crow requested weapons to defend themselves and assisted the Army in capturing the Sioux.⁵

The Army became responsible for the area after Indian agents could no longer handle Indians problems. Transition to the Army resulted in several expeditions into the area removing Indians not living on reservations. Sixty to sixty-five thousand lived within nine Sioux agencies with an unknown number leaving in search of food. The Army believed these departing Indians would follow the buffalo.⁶ In December 1867, the Indian Commissioner ordered the Indians to reservations, but the Indians did not comply. In response, the War Department ordered the Army to force the Indians back onto the reservations. General Sheridan, the department commander, decided to use a three prong attack to pursue and defeat the Indians. The plan

called for three converging columns. General Terry commanded the northern column, Colonel John Gibbons from the East, and General Crook from the South (see figure 2).

Chapter three will follow General Crook's forces and discuss each battle in greater detail. Crook, although known for his fierceness, believed mismanagement and poor treatment of Indians by the traders and agents were 99 percent of the Indian problems.⁷ He mounted a theater operation, starting the "Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition."⁸

The Army had changed little from the Bozeman Trail War. It still used many of the same types of weapons; the basic arm was still the single shot breach-loading rifle or carbine. Only on rare occasions, did the Army employ cannons because of the extra wagons and animals needed to haul them. Most commanders saw artillery as a burden to mobility when their primary combat mission was to pursue the Indians. The Gatlin gun existed, but like the cannon, few commanders agreed to accept the logistical challenge to train, setup, and employ the weapon.

The Army no longer built forts and supplied soldiers to protect travelers from Indians. It did change tactics to pursuit of Indian with larger forces than seen before. With the Army now in charge of the Indian problem, President Grant gave it the mission of removing Indians from the area and moving them to reservations or eliminating those who resisted. In effect, the President swept aside Indian treaties and used the Army to open the West for travelers, prospectors, Indian traders, and settlers, who plundered the Indians' last home and only remaining hunting grounds.⁹

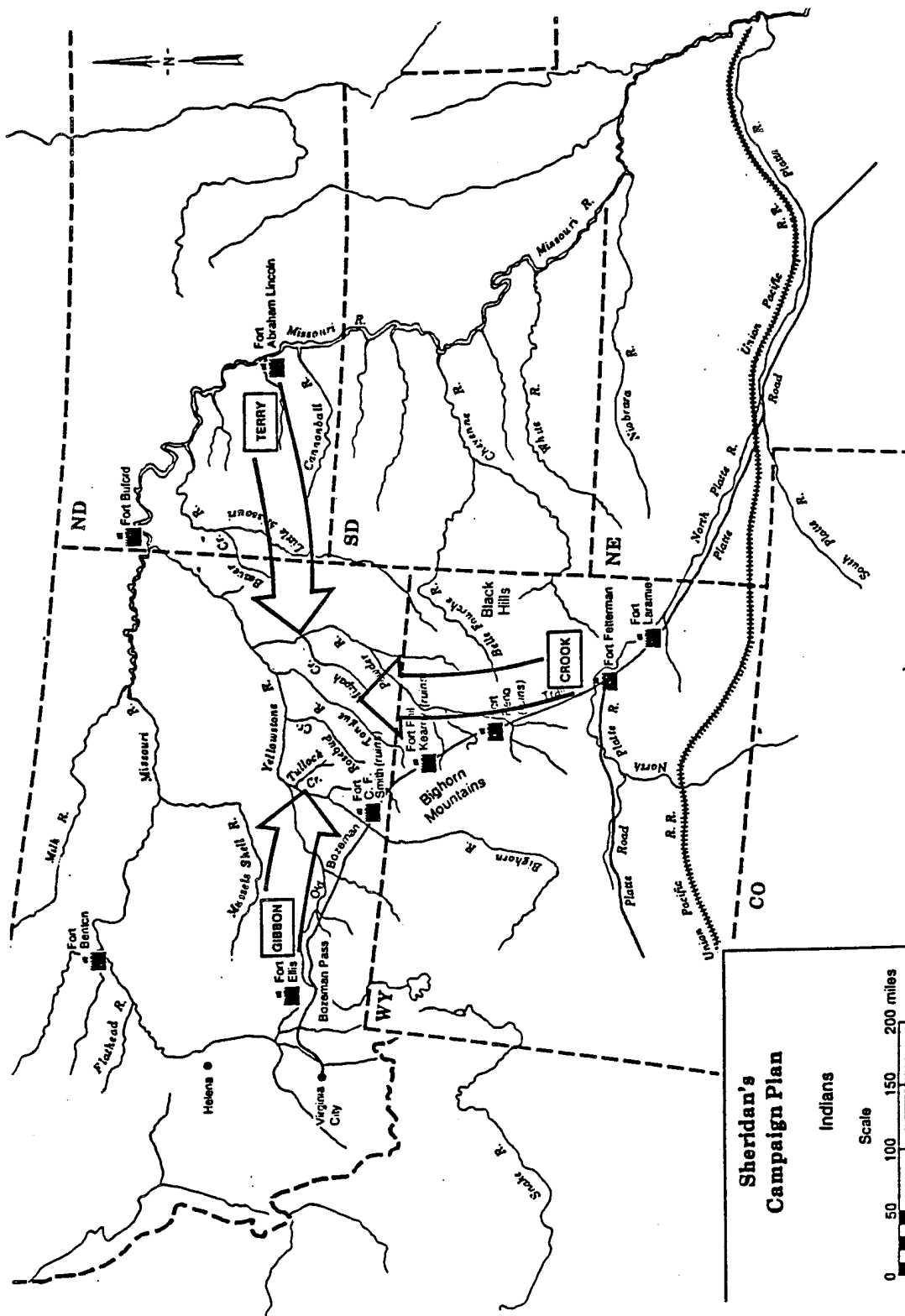


Figure 2. Sheridan Plan

In the spring of 1876, war between the Sioux and Army became apparent. The Sioux and their allies concentrated along the Rosebud Creek, in a valley near Little Big Horn Mountains. Eventually they would gather approximately two thousand warriors. Enraged at the constant encroachment of whites rushing into the Black Hills in search of gold, the Indian chiefs saw this as the perfect time to exert power to reclaim the Black Hills in the same manner they retained the Bozeman Trail.¹⁰

The Indian leaders were Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Spotted Tail, and Crazy Horse. Red Cloud, known for his campaign along the Bozeman Trail, was the elder and looked to for wisdom. Sitting Bull, considered the ultimate warrior of the Sioux during their hostilities against the whites, was a forty-year-old medicine man, political advisor, and spiritual visionary. He held an unyielding hatred of whites and exerted broad influence and leadership.¹¹ Rich by Indian standards, Sitting Bull became wealthy and powerful at the same time by dealing with the other tribes. He dressed in store bought clothes and could have passed as an alderman or ward boss.

Crazy Horse was respected as one of the best leaders and a military genius. Many Indians thought him an equal to Sitting Bull, a great warrior, invincible in battle, and also a visionary. He and Sitting Bull had a cohesive relationship causing other Indians to seek their protection and advice.¹² Spotted Tail, the fourth leader, was capable but more reserved and, therefore, occasionally overshadowed by the others.

The Sioux were not the only Indians in the area. The Cheyenne, with approximately four-hundred warriors had significant fighting

abilities. They became strongly allied with the Sioux, as noted earlier, because of the rush of whites into their traditional tribal lands. A few additional tribes joined their alliance due to the fierceness of the Sioux. The Sioux-led alliance satisfied their societal needs and insured relative independence and security through aggression. The Sioux had not inherited the plains, but methodically conquered it in their quest for economic and social growth.¹³ Most of other tribes in the Northwest resigned themselves to life on reservations. Some tribes, like the Crows, even assisted the Army in its war against the Sioux.

Brigadier General George Crook, known as the Army's worst dressed officer, took command of the Department of the Platte in the spring of 1875. Many believed Crook was the best Indian fighter in the Army. Earlier he had been very effective against the Apaches. He fought similarly to the Indians, not unlike guerrilla tactics.¹⁴ Crook had great tenacity, pushing himself and his command, while maintaining his privacy. He once stated "the worse it gets, the better; always hunt Indians in bad weather."¹⁵ Crook usually did not employ deception and charged straight ahead into hostile territory.¹⁶

Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds, also a subordinate of General Crook's during the Mexican and Civil Wars, played a significant role in the battle of the Powder River. He was not a forceful leader and did not perform as General Crook expected during the Powder River Battle. Along with two of his subordinate officers, Reynolds was court-martialed for failures during this battle which ended his career.

Lieutenant Colonel William B. Royall, a battalion commander for Crook, was an important player in the battle of the Rosebud. He was a competent soldier, but inexperienced in the ways of the Indians. There

were other subordinate leaders who played key roles; each will be discussed during the analysis of the battles.

On 1 March 1876, General Crook started from Fort Fetterman on a forced march campaign to remove the Sioux Indians from the area. His command consisted of ten cavalry companies and two infantry companies which he organized into six battalions. He had thirty commissioned officers, six hundred enlisted, thirty-five scouts, five pack trains employing sixty-two packers, eighty-nine wagon train employees, and five ambulance employees, for a total of eight hundred and eighty-three men. He took wagons of all kinds totaling eighty-five including ambulances. His command had six hundred and fifty-six public horses and eight hundred and ninety-two public mules.

General Crook's first engagement with the Sioux and their allies was along the Powder River.¹⁷ The origin of Powder River is in the Big Horn Mountains with a series of tributaries culminating southward into the central Wyoming plateau covering four hundred and eighty-six miles. It has limited crossing sites due to changing mud flats, quicksand, and rough terrain, making all travel difficult.¹⁸

The weather during the spring was miserable. The wind was constantly blowing with temperatures regularly below zero and, at times, dropping below minus twenty-six.¹⁹ The snow constantly drifted from the blowing wind, making tracking and traveling difficult over the broken terrain. Crook, hard pressed to find Indians, moved his units day and night. His troops had limited supplies and endured for days on half-rations. Most of the time the command did not permit fires. These hardships, along with the rugged terrain, made life exceedingly austere

for the soldiers. They were so weary at times they would drop in their tracks and had to be lifted from the snow to their feet.²⁰

On 16 March, General Crook ordered Reynolds to take half the command and follow the trail of two Indians he observed earlier when riding with the advance party. Crook directed Reynolds to perform a night search for the village of the two Indians. Crook's plan was for he and the remaining three battalions to take a different route the next day in an attempt to surround the Indians. Reynolds quickly formed his command, taking no supplies except one day ration of hard bread. At 5:00 p.m., Reynolds departed with Frank Grouard as his guide and a guide with each battalion to keep them from becoming lost in the poor conditions of night.

The evening was good for their march being cloudy, hazy, damp, and cold; an advantage against detection from the Indians. The guides needed to stop every half-hour and light matches to check the trail or rediscover it. Around 4:00 a.m. on the 17 March, Reynolds stopped the command in a ravine for a rest and sent his scouts out in search of the Indian village. At dawn Grouard returned to inform regarding the possibility of an Indian camp ahead. The Colonel, therefore, rapidly advanced his troops forward. After five miles they met other scouts who confirmed a large Indian camp was ahead along the Powder River. The Indians positioned their camp against a bluff and among a cottonwood grove. The Scouts noted the Indians selected the village site for its adaptability and speedy abandonment rather than a position of strength for battle.

Leaving his troops within a half mile of the Indians, Reynolds and his scouts went forward to reconnoiter the village consisting of over one hundred lodges housing more than seven-hundred Indians, several hundred ponies, and large amounts of food needed by General Crook's hungry forces. When the colonel returned, he, his guides, and senior officers made plans for the attack. Two groups were to surround the Indian village while a third charged the center on horse-back. Captain Anson Mills led forty-seven horsemen and advanced toward the objective. When they were within two hundred yards of the village an Indian herder boy gave an alarm. The groups had not completed surrounding the camp before the Indians, reacting to the alarm, opened fire and started retreating to the bluffs.

Captain Mills charged the village with revolvers blazing and lost several horses to Indian fire. He led a second charge which successfully drove the Indians from their encampment to the high ground behind it. Although not capturing or killing any Indians while overwhelming the objective, the soldiers wounded several and seized their pony herd. Shortly afterwards, the Indians, now hidden on the bluffs, started to fire upon the soldiers. Reynolds' troops completed securing and occupying the village while the Indians directed increasingly better rifle fire as time progressed.

Reynolds established a strong position in the village to deter the Indians, who held the advantage of the high ground but did not have food, shelter, water, horses, or large amounts of ammunition. However, after five hours of fighting, Colonel Reynolds lost his nerve and feared he would be cut off and surrounded by hostiles. He ordered the

destruction of the village stores including all clothes, buffalo robes, moccasins, buckskin clothing, large amounts of meats, fruits, and utensils. Additionally the soldiers destroyed teepees containing kegs and canisters of powder, lead bars, percussion caps, fixed ammunition, axes, knives, saddles (one hundred and twenty-five), sewing outfits, and saddlebags. So precipitous was his retreat that the destruction of the camp was poorly done and a wounded soldier was left behind to fall into the hands of the Indians.²¹ Reynolds could have used the captured resources to cloth and feed his own destitute soldiers. His rapid retreat continued until he caught General Crook by the end of the next day after having lost the captured pony herd to an Indian raid.

The Colonel and his troops had marched fifty-five miles in poor weather and over rough terrain to fight a battle all within twenty-six hours. Also they had no sleep and little food the previous night, going a total distance of seventy-three miles without rest in the last thirty-six hours. During all this, four soldiers and one Indian were killed.

Upon investigating the battle, General Crook heard complaints of misconduct by several officers. They had failed to perform their duties during the battle and did not accomplish the mission. Therefore, upon returning to Fort Fetterman Crook preferred charges against Colonel Reynolds, and Captains Henry Noyes and Alexander Moore, for their dereliction before the enemy. Captains Noyes and Moore had been the leaders of the two groups ordered to surround the village and failed to secure their positions as ordered. After a long trial all three were found guilty by a court-martial with Reynolds permitted to retire with

disability and the other two remaining on active duty without pay for a specified time.²²

The Powder River Battle could have accomplished several tasks in favor of Crook's command. If Reynolds successfully held the village, Crook could have campaigned longer with the added supplies. Secondly, had Reynolds sent for Crook upon finding the village, their combined forces could have destroyed the Indians and potentially curtailed the Indian buildup for Little Big Horn. Another factor pertains to the ponies Reynolds failed to secure. Without their ponies, many Indians would have been eliminated from a fighting role. A tribe without ponies was not a threat. Such would have dealt a blow to the Indians' morale; instead it was an encouraging victory for the Indians.

Some of Reynolds problems were his subordinates. Captain Moore failed to take his position and in doing so allowed the Indians to escape. Captain James Egan, appointed to charge the village, was blunted, leaving the Indians to stand fast and fight, giving the others time to climb the bluffs. One of the battalions dismounted during the battle and made coffee, unsaddled their horses, and ate lunch while the other battalions fought the Indians.²³ It was apparent the command had significant leadership problems. This may be the reason Crook showed little confidence in his subordinates in subsequent battles after the Powder River, during which he did not confide in anyone regarding his plans.

After the battle of the Powder River, Crook's command returned to Fort Fetterman, worn and defeated, on 26 March. Crook and his command rested and prepared for the next operation. On 28 May 1876,

Crook assumed direct command of the Bighorn and Yellowstone expedition.²⁴ This new task led Crook to leave Fort Fetterman and begin his campaign the next day. He started towards the Bighorn mountains with an impressive force, eventually arriving along Rosebud Creek.

The battle at Rosebud Creek occurred on 17 June 1876, in southern Montana. It was one of the largest U.S. Army-Indian engagements, covering an area greater than the battle of Little Big Horn which happened eight days later, with many of the same Indians participating in both. Rosebud Creek was a hard fought battle, dispersed over four miles of ground, with fierce charges and counter-charges on terrain cut up with ravines and ridges. Crook had a fighting force of approximately thirteen hundred opposing Crazy Horse's fourteen hundred Sioux and approximately one hundred Cheyenne. The Battle of the Rosebud was the only major defeat Crook suffered against the Indians. Nevertheless, Crook maintained he did not lose the battle because he occupied the field after the engagement. His superiors called it a "banner victory," meaning in name only.²⁵

Until this time Crook had only dealt with the semi-nomadic tribes in the South. Some felt he did not realize the prowess of the Sioux; despite the warnings of numerous guides, scouts, and friendly Indians accompanying him.²⁶ Crook desired to strike the enemy quickly and rapidly reorganize the command before ordering it to march. None believed they would run into a force of the size they encountered. The officers and men, most being veterans of Indian campaigns, thought this crusade would be like others with a few pitched battles and the Army in a futile pursuit after evading Indians.

Crook left Fort Fetterman with the 2d Cavalry consisting of two hundred and sixty-nine men, the 3d Cavalry of five hundred and thirty-four men, one hundred and seventy-five attached infantry, twenty packers, and sixty-five mountain miners. Along the march eighty-six Shoshone and one hundred and seventy-six Crow Indians joined Crook, for a total of thirteen hundred and twenty-five. He hoped to approach within thirty miles of the Sioux village then advance during the night to surprise them. Crook unlike other leaders, would start the day by having the infantry leave first and march ahead. Two hours later the cavalry would depart and pass the infantry during the day. Both the infantry and cavalry would arrive before the support trains. This leapfrogging method would string-out his command over four miles.²⁷

On June 15, General Crook in order to increase his mobility directed his West Point classmate, Major Chambers, to select a sufficient number of mules to mount his infantry soldiers. Chambers and his officers, protested but Crook compelled him to comply. They devoted the entire day to training the infantry to ride in what became known as "the mule brigade."²⁸ When Crook reached the Tongue River, he met a Sioux courier with a message from Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull warning him not to cross the river. The General disregarded the message.

The Indians village was on Reno Creek, approximately twenty miles north of the Rosebud. They had a large gathering of Indians from six tribes: the Hunkpapa Sioux under Sitting Bull were the most numerous; the Oglala Sioux under Crazy Horse; the Arrows-All-Gone Sioux under Hump Nose; the Cheyenne under Old Bear, Dirty Moccasins, and Crazy Head; a few Blackfeet with no real leader; and Lame White Man with a

Southern Cheyenne tribe. Sitting Bull, a spiritual leader, conducted a sacred ceremony and received a vision of many soldiers falling in battle, which was an omen of victory for the Indians.²⁹

As Crook moved towards Rosebud Creek, where his scouts told him the Indians camped, he saw no hostiles except for a small hunting party. On 16 June, Crook's command marched a hard thirty-five miles and bivouacked at the headwaters of the Rosebud. Crook was dissatisfied with the intelligence gathered by his scouts during the day. He became more chagrined as evening approached. He knew the Sioux were nearby and urged his Shoeshone Indian scouts to go out in search for the Sioux village. They declined, fearing the Sioux.³⁰ Aware of the soldier's presence, the Indian leaders held a council of war. The council decided to send large bands to intercept the soldiers at the bend of the Rosebud Creek where the Army would be at a disadvantage due to rough terrain with narrow valleys.³¹

On the morning of 17 June, Crook woke the camp at 3:00 a.m. and proceeded to march by 6:00 a.m. without any indication of danger from his scouts. The soldiers carried only four days of supply because Crook desired to travel light and had left the support wagons behind. When Crook had gone approximately five miles he reached the valley between the two bends of the Rosebud Creek at 8:00 a.m. Here he dispatched additional scouts and ordered the command to stop and eat breakfast in an area described as an amphitheater hemmed in by a line of bluffs. The command unsaddled the horses and mules and permitted them to graze, while the men started fires to brew coffee. Crook played cards. His Indians and soldiers held horse races with the camp strung out for a

mile along both sides of the creek.³² Crook, based on General Sheridan's campaign planning assumptions, was looking for an Indian village to attack. He had not considered that the Indians may attack him.

The lead scouts unexpectedly encountered an advance party of Sioux approximately nine miles north of Rosebud Creek. Sioux warriors immediately started firing upon the scouts who escaped in the direction of Crook's command. Soldiers of the command heard shots and yelling but assumed the scouts were just hunting buffalo. Only when the scouts reached the camp yelling "Lacota, Lacota," meaning Sioux, and then seeing their injuries did the troops react. Given poor topography, Crook headed for a nearby ridge to observe the advancing Indians. By this time the hostiles were everywhere (see figure 3).³³

While the hostiles charged in waves, Lieutenant Colonel William B. Royall and Captain Azor H. Nickerson deployed the command. The extremely rough terrain combined with unorthodox and unexpected Indian warfare methods caused confusion and difficulty for the Army commanders. They could not see each other to coordinate their actions. This resulted in disconnected small unit actions over the entire battlefield. Without waiting for orders Major George M. Randall, chief of the scouts, hurriedly organized the remaining scouts and formed a skirmish line in front of the deploying troops. This barrier held off the advancing Indians for twenty minutes giving the soldiers enough time to mount and form, never relinquishing to the constant barrage of Indians.³⁴

When Crook returned from the hilltop, he found the command scattered. He intended to charge northward and sent runners to relay

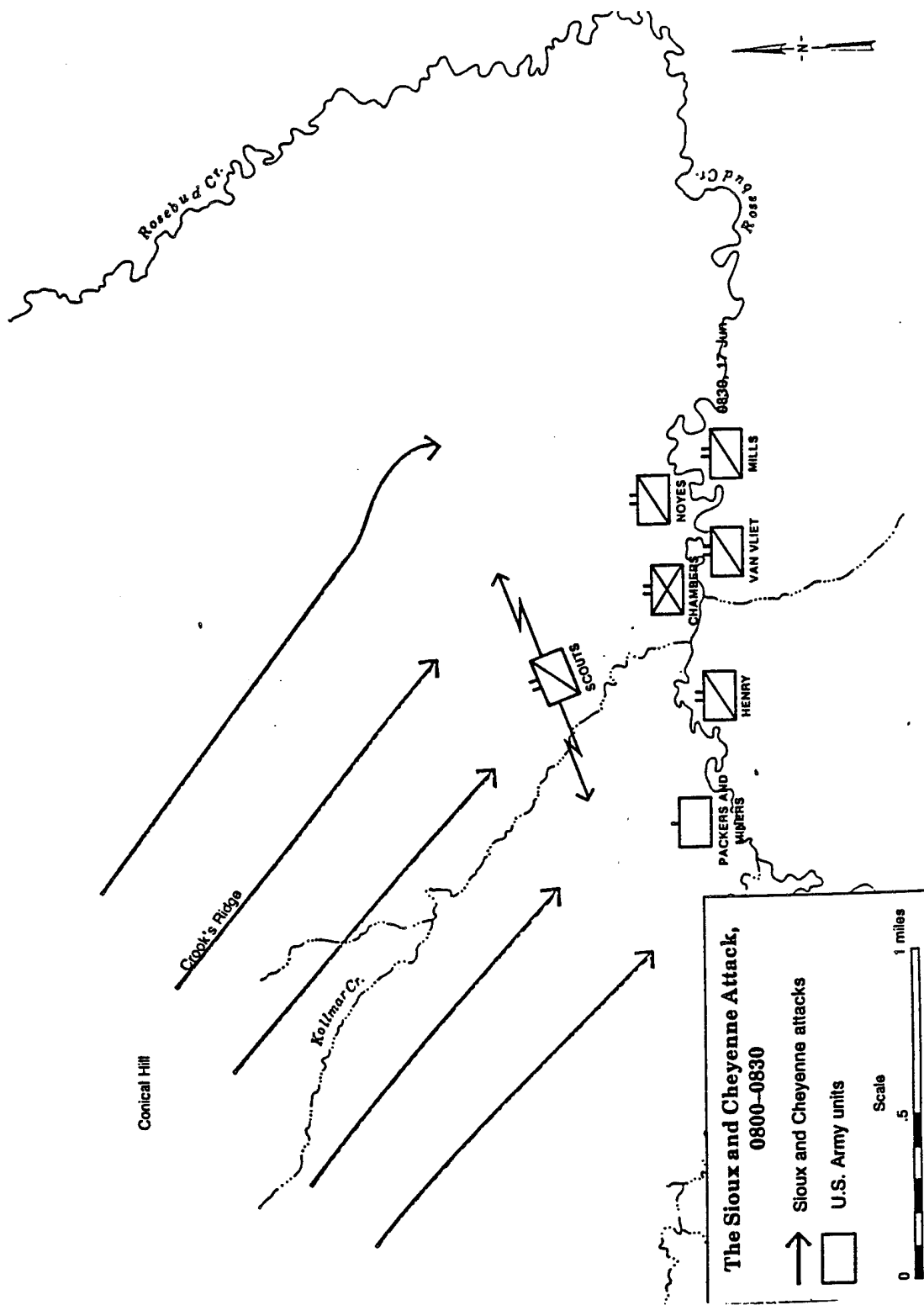


Figure 3. Rosebud Indian Attack

orders to dispersed elements. Captain Anson Mills received orders to seize and hold the high ground on the bluffs to the right. Mills did so. Crook sent word for Royall, on the left, to join with his forces. However, Royall had fallen for the Indian method of using decoys and was slow to respond.³⁵ Captain Frederick Van Vliet, ordered to secure the bluffs to the rear, met a band of Sioux as he approached the crest. Seeing this, Van Vliet ordered his detachment to charge, thereby, repulsing the Indians. He stayed on top of the bluff the remainder of the battle, seeing little action himself, but witnessing most of the battle from this vantage point.

As the battle continued, Indians appeared everywhere, circling wildly and charging continuously with rapid and accurate rifle fire. The troops returned fire on the Indians, with some accuracy and limited effect. The hostile Indians used the terrain to screen their advance upon the high ground to continue their harassing fire. The Soldiers charged up the hill only to be repulsed by a countercharge from the Indians. Royall finally recognized that his unit was being decoyed away from the main body and in danger of being surrounded and destroyed. This forced Royall to retreat, creating an opening which brought his right flank under fire. Royall saw himself in a no win situation. He needed to follow orders, yet to do so would mean certain disaster for his battalion. His troops were in a location with no support and under constant attack from Indians on all sides. He later decided to risk the move, subsequently linking-up with Crook's forces located in the center of the battle. Royall lost several men in the process.³⁶

As the battle raged the intensity increased in different areas with three separate fights occurring simultaneously: Royall on the left and separated from Crook by a large ravine. Crook in the center and Captain Mills, on the right closing with Crook while clearing the bluffs. Crook made several charges up Conical Hill with Crazy Horse sending waves of warriors to repulse him. The Indians charged while exposing little of their bodies for the soldiers to aim at. They did this by hanging on with one arm and foot and firing from under the neck of the horse.³⁷

At approximately 10:00 a.m. Crook ordered Captain Mills to disengage and proceed up the valley in search of the Sioux village. Once again Crook was basing his actions on the campaign planning assumptions. He was convinced the characteristic Indian attack must be a desperate rear guard action by the Indians to defend a nearby Indian village. Crook still held to his intention of destroying the Sioux's village. When Mills departed the ridge, Indians occupied the right flank and inflicted accurate fire into the center of the troops. The soldiers, under murderous fire, retreated to escape sure death. Seeing this, the infantry pushed forward and recaptured the ridge. Up to this point, Crook still believed he could defeat the Indians. Crazy Horse, seeing the withdrawal of Mills forces made an all out attack driving the troops back. Only then did Crook realize he could not send his command after the Indian village. He placed his sharpshooters on the ridge to delay the Indians while his adjutant went to recall Mills.³⁸ At approximately 1:30 p.m. (see figure 4), Mills returned causing Crazy Horse to retreat.

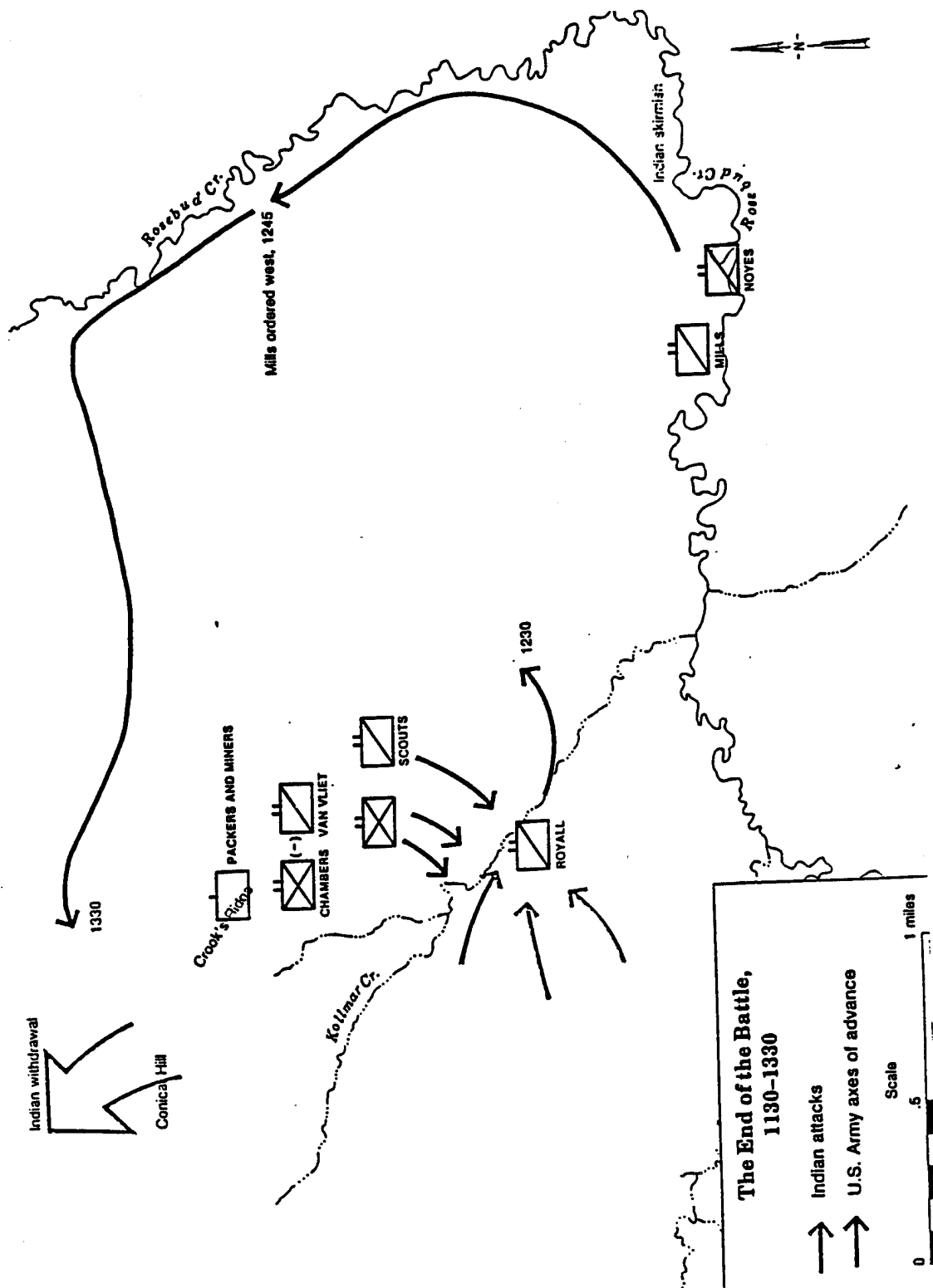


Figure 4. Rosebud End of Battle

During the battle a Cheyenne named Comes-In-Sight had his horse shot from under him. As is the Indian custom, he did not run from the battlefield, though afoot, distant from other Indians, and an easy prey. As scouts closed in, out dashed an unknown rider, zigzagging towards Comes-In-Sight, picking him up and riding off. His rescuer was none other than his sister, Buffalo-Calf-Road-Woman. For her act of bravery, the Cheyenne recall this battle "where the girl saved her brother."³⁹

After the cease fire, Crook consolidated the command and assembled the cavalry and scouts. He marched northward towards where he thought the Indian village was, but the Crows remained behind for a pow-wow. The Crows feared the Sioux had raided their village while they participated in this campaign.⁴⁰ As the command entered a narrow canyon, the Shoshone refused to go any farther, fearing the canyon was a death-trap with the Sioux waiting. Without the assistance of the Crows and Shoshone, Crook returned to Rosebud Creek to care for his command.⁴¹

The battle had raged for six hours, up and down rugged terrain, with both sides making charges and countercharges. Discrepancies existed regarding the number killed and wounded during the battle. By most accounts, nine men and one friendly Indian were killed, twenty-one wounded, with thirteen dead enemy.⁴² The next morning Crook retreated from the area due to a shortage of rations and ammunition, failing to linkup with General Terry's column, which was approximately fifty miles away on the Yellowstone River.

This battle was critical for several reasons: it stopped Crook from making the linkup with the other forces, handing the Army and Crook a resounding defeat; it was the first battle Indians fought force on

force with nearly equal numbers; and it was a prelude to the Little Bighorn battle taking place less than two weeks later. If the Army leaders learned from the lessons of this battle, they may have avoided the Little Bighorn massacre. However, the Army did not expect Indians to fight in this manner. Crook and his entire command were caught flatfooted, but they were not vanquished.⁴³ They realized their good fortune since only half of the Indians in the area participated in the battle. Custer would not be so lucky.⁴⁴ Regardless, this engagement neutralized one of the military prongs and enabled the Indians to concentrate forces on other Army commands.⁴⁵

After the battle on Rosebud Creek, Crook returned to his camp on Goose Creek, staying there seven weeks awaiting reinforcements. After receiving substantial re-enforcement's he started after the Indians again. He met General Terry on 10 August near the Rosebud where they combined forces. They continued to pursue the now old trail of departing Indians until supplies ran out and forced the command to halt. Crook decided to leave with only a partial resupply and headed Eastward on 22 August 1876.

On 9 and 10 September 1876, the battle of Slim Buttes occurred, just eleven weeks after Custer's disaster at Little Big Horn. Slim Buttes, located on a rugged plain in the northwest corner of South Dakota, was the first victory for the Army during the Sioux Wars. The Army fielded the largest forces to date, producing a significant morale raising victory. This battle was a retaliatory blow to the Indians for their part in Custer's massacre.⁴⁶

The Army considered it a victory and ultimately a turning point leading to eventual destruction of the Indians. Although this was not the feeling of all, General Crook's late-Summer campaign drew praise and controversy along with some long-lasting animosity.⁴⁷ This particular campaign was extremely frustrating for Crook, he was not as successful as he wanted to be. He neglected the proper use of scouts at Rosebud and he now neglected logistics. Only his tenacity compensated for his lack of brilliance and foresight. If blind luck had not played a part, his entire command could have been lost.⁴⁸

In early August Crook and Terry's forces met to coordinate and resupply. On August 25, General Crook separated from General Terry and headed east. Crook wanted to be free of Terry's control and decided to leave with only a partial re-supply, whereas, Terry stayed to resupply his forces before moving. Crook took fifteen-hundred cavalry, four hundred and fifty infantry, forty-five white volunteers, and two hundred and forty Snake and Ute Indians with fourteen days rations. He knew he could neither pursue the Indians with slow moving wagon trains nor afford to leave behind critical supplies and reinforcements. He directed everything be eliminated except for bare essentials to make the column more mobile. Tents, cooking utensils, wheeled vehicles, and ambulances would not be taken. He planned to base his logistics on pack mules but failed to add any to the existing mule train.⁴⁹

During the following weeks, Crook led his men on a punishing march through the Badlands and mud flats, enduring terrible weather with little rations.⁵⁰ On 5 September, the soldiers were down to half rations. The lack of food now began to take its toll. Soldiers

resorted to eating their pack mules and horses. They shot the animals that could not keep up and cooked them during the night's bivouac. Some of the soldiers called this march "the starvation march" and others "the horse-meat march."⁵¹

On September 7, Generals Crook and Wesley Merritt called Captain Anson Mills to their headquarters. The command was down to one day of rations and near actual starvation. Crook ordered Mills to take one hundred and fifty men and fifty pack mules to Deadwood, one hundred and seventy-five miles away, and pick up supplies. Mills departed at 9:00 p.m. with fortuitous orders to seize and hold any Indian villages he encountered.⁵²

During the night of 8 September, the guide observed Indian tracks and called for Captain Mills. Mills ordered his guide to follow the tracks. While doing so, scouts saw warriors who led the troops to an Indian village along Slim Buttes. Captain Mills prepared plans to attack and around 2:00 a.m. he formed the command and moved them around the Indian camp. He ordered his men to kill as many Indians as possible, stampede and capture the stock, and take the village intact.⁵³

Mills organized his command into three sections for this attack: two on foot at each side of the camp, and the third on horseback at one end poised to charge through the village and stampede the horses. Lieutenant Frederick Schwatta was in charge of the cavalry with orders to charge the camp if the Indian ponies spooked or by signal from Mills. Before the troops surrounded the village, the ponies became spooked and woke the Indians, causing Schwatta and the foot soldiers to charge the village. Schwatta drove the ponies from the village but the Indians did not respond as expected and exited their teepees by cutting

openings in the back, away from the attacking soldiers. Lieutenants Adolphus Von Luettwitz's and Emmet Crawford's detachments chased the Indians as they fled the village across a creek taking refuge in a ravine among the buttes.⁵⁴

Mills and his troops entered the village and searched for Indians and food stores. They found one Indian girl and a huge cache of supplies. However, as the troops advanced through the village they received gun fire from the Indians in the ravine. The Indians secured their families in caves within the ravine and returned to fight. One group of Indians tried to recover the ponies but two soldiers gallantly thwarted them.

The soldiers advanced toward the deep and narrow ravine but were repelled by highly accurate rifle fire. The Indians dug pockets into the ravine and built breastworks for defense of the area. Some of the soldiers low crawled forward but did not enter the ravine for fear of being killed. Mills saw he could not dislodge the Indians with the forces he had and decided to send for help. He sent messengers to find General Crook and inform him of the situation. In the meantime, Mills had the soldiers collect everything of value. But as the men were collecting the supplies, Indians from the ravine attacked the weak points around the village. This forced Mills to form a perimeter around the camp and also the ravine.

At 11:30 a.m., 9 September, Crook arrived with two hundred and fifty troops to relieve Mills. With the extra troops, they were able to enter the village and collect everything. Given the General's blind luck, they found enough supplies to feed Crook's starving troops for a few days. They discovered sacks of flour, corn, fruit, beans, salt, pepper, and tobacco; along with guns, saddles, harnesses, clothing, blankets, canvas, percussion caps, ammunition, metal cooking utensils,

dishes, and bolts of calico; two-thousand buffalo, elk, and deer skins; but most of all, freshly killed meat and over five thousand pounds of dried meat. Of equal importance, they discovered remnants of the battle of Little Big Horn: saddles, guidons, officer blouses, and orderly books, which left little doubt that some of these Indians were responsible for the annihilation of Custer's unit.⁵⁵

Crook sent out his scout, Grouard, to talk to the Indians about a peaceful surrender. The Indians declined, telling the scout they also had sent for reinforcements. They informed Grouard that they were part of Crazy Horse's outer perimeter and would wait for their reinforcements. This led to another round of fighting which ended with the surrender of the mortally wounded Indian Chief American Horse and several women and children. The famous scout "Buffalo Chips" White and two soldiers were killed in this latest gun battle. From the twenty-three Indians captured, they learn of the presence of Crazy Horse, He Dog, and Kicking Bear at a nearby Oglala camp.⁵⁶

Crook moved the wounded to teepees and had the scouts talk to the Indians again. Again, they defied the requests to surrender. In response Crook placed soldiers around the ravine with a line of soldiers at one end. When the Indians started firing, the soldiers opened fire with a murderous volley, killing several and prompting the surrender of the remaining two hundred and fifty Indians hiding there with American Horse and Roman Nose. Their village was a buffer for Crazy Horse's main camp approximately twenty miles away. After searching the village just captured, many soldiers sat down to eat and rest while the others burnt the unused stores and the remnants of the village.⁵⁷

Although in the Indian camp for four hours, Crook made no preparations for a counter-attack from Crazy Horse's near-by camp. Not surprisingly, Crazy Horse, soon attacked with six to eight hundred

warriors to recover their ponies and properties and free the captured. The Indians succeeded in securing the high ground with the advantage of terrain. Employing his entire command of two thousand soldiers, Crook finally repulsed the Indians but made no effort to pursue. Crazy Horse continued his attacks several times during the night with the soldiers fighting only to hold ground.⁵⁸

The next morning Crook evacuated Slim Buttes and headed for Deadwood. Crazy Horse attacked the troops as they departed, but again Crook showed no interest in pursuing. The following day Crook ordered one hundred and fifty men to pursue the Indian trail he ignored the day before. The troops did not find any Indians and returned to their parent unit the next day. The command continued to Deadwood in a leisurely manner with several horses and mules dying along the way. The men, exhausted and nearly starved, looked forward to ending the march.

This particular campaign is notable for several reasons. It showed the perseverance and courage of leadership and the hardships soldiers endured to punish the Indians for Custer's massacre. It demonstrated Crook's planning deficiencies, inability to see his command deteriorating, failure to pursue the Indians when he could have destroyed Crazy Horse and his entire warrior band, neglect in protecting the command from a known enemy, and not accepting culmination when his subordinates informed him he could not continue the campaign without severe losses. Yet, given tenacity and some luck, he won a tactical victory against the Indians and gave the nation a needed morale boost, though at a cost of several men, numerous horses and mules, and tons of supplies. In doing so, General Crook lost the trust of his command and they lost their will to fight. Many soldiers no longer possessed the resolve to follow a leader who did not have the welfare of his men in mind.

The Centennial Campaign revealed the Army had problems with doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment. This chapter demonstrates the Army did make changes and learned from their earlier mistakes, but still had difficulties in each area. Their adversary adapted to these earlier changes, forcing the Army to reassess their fighting principles in all these areas. Each of these areas will be discussed in more detail.

The key to the Army's difficulties is a lack of effective doctrine. Army doctrine made no significant change between the Bozeman Trail and Centennial Campaigns. Methods did change somewhat in that the Army no longer emplaced forts to protect settlers. Instead it took more aggressive actions by placing Indians on reservations or, otherwise, eliminating them. With the perceived failure of the Indian Bureau and Department of Interior to effectively regulate Indians, the mission of controlling Indians reverted to the Army. Until then, they did not permit the Army to enter Indian Reservations, resulting in little contact between the Army and Indians. The Army actively pursued those Indians not complying with settlement on reservations with large forces to eliminate them. White people soon wanted more than the right to pass through Indian land, they wanted to possess it.

As the Army accepted its new mission, the government declared war on any Indians refusing to move onto reservations. The Indians were now trying to understand the whiteman's way of fighting. Indians used smaller bands, performed raids and did not attempt to kill all whites, but only those threatening their immediate survival. This philosophy made most Indian campaigns nothing more than a few pitted battles ending in futile chases. Indians seldom fought against large concentrations of forces.⁵⁹

The Centennial Campaign demonstrated a significant change to Indian methods of warfare. The Army failed to prepare or adapt to these changes. Indians departed from sporadic attacks with limited numbers. The Sioux joined forces with Cheyenne in a common cause, fighting in an unprecedented manner. Army leaders were not prepared for this change to conventional tactics from an unconventional adversary.⁶⁰ Indians took advantage of this change at the Rosebud and Little Big Horn before the Army reacted and adapted. As before, these changes were not recorded nor incorporated into any doctrine, but just executed at the tactical level.

Leadership changed from the top down. President Grant had strong feelings on how to correct the Indian problems. In addition, he received pressure from citizens and politicians to solve the Black Hills-Indian problem. Hence, the Government attempted to purchase the Black Hills without success. This caused Grant to apply his military instrument of power as the solution, with the Department of Interior and Indian Bureau no longer controlling the Indians. In effect, the government's attitude changed from "dove" to "hawk."

The key leader discussed in this chapter was General Crook, known as somewhat eccentric in dress and mannerisms, which included riding a mule.⁶¹ Although known for quality leadership during the Civil War and earlier Indian campaigns, his methods against the Sioux left serious doubts regarding his abilities. He, like Custer, had contempt for the fighting qualities of the Indian. Both suffered from overconfidence despite repeated warnings of the Sioux's warlike nature and ferocity.⁶²

With misguided tenacity, Crook traveled without supply wagons and had soldiers carrying their own food and gear. The General did not plan for resupply and cut rations so severely his command almost starved

to death. He drove troops so unmercilessly that soldiers dropped in their tracks and animals died along the route. Crook would not even stop in sub-zero weather, pushing ahead for days without permitting soldiers to start fires. This adversely affected morale and caused the entire command to question the soundness of his reasons.

In his hurry to prosecute the Indians, Crook forgot to send out scouts and failed to heed enemy messages of imminent attack. He refused to listen to subordinates about the condition of his command or the abilities of the adversary. Failing to properly assess the situation during the Rosebud Battle, Crook ordered the command to bivouac without establishing security. Not even considering the Indians may attack his force, he permitted the command to stand-down and relax their level of alertness. He aggravated matters by leaving the command, venturing to the top of a hill, observing the Indians for a protracted time, and causing junior personnel to take charge of the command.⁶³

There was controversy between Crook and his subordinates in several instances. The Powder River Battle identified several officers who did not perform to Crook's standard. These same leaders were successful until this battle. One commander, a Civil War veteran, had his career terminated when Crook court-martialed him and two of his subordinates. During the battle of Rosebud, Crook and another junior officer did not agree over a failure to linkup quickly. Newspaper stories blaming defeat on poor generalship made these ill feelings fester long after the battle.⁶⁴ In the Slim Buttes battle, Crook further distanced himself from his troops by exhausting their offensive capability and consequently, destroying their confidence in his leadership abilities. His reputation diminished further when he failed at several opportunities to aggressively pursue and defeat Crazy Horse and his band. Only much later, after losing contact, did Crook try to

find and destroy Crazy Horse, again placing doubts in the minds of his troops.

Another fault of Crook's leadership weaknesses was his inability to see the big picture, exemplified by his failing to realize the necessity of completing linkup with General Terry. Blind to the manner and numbers with which the Indians attacked, he did not perceive the initiation of a major Indian offensive. Correctly assessing the operational environment and assisting General Terry could have possibly averted the Little Big Horn Massacre.⁶⁵

Normally deployed on long campaigns covering vast amounts of territory, troops did not receive training during summer. If a soldier arrived in a unit during summer he would learn on the job while campaigning against the Indians. During winters soldiers repaired their equipment, tended to their horses, and performed normal garrison duties. Training focused on target practice and drilling with horses. Soldiers did not specifically train to fight Indians. Most felt they could defeat the Indians when found and forced into a battle with limited escape.

The Indians were different, their everyday lifestyle and basic survival constituted an excellent training program for the plains war. Renowned and feared, a brave honed his skills in weaponry and horsemanship at an early age. Indians lived with their horses. Unencumbered by excess food, shelter, or equipment, they were "the best cavalry in the world, their likes never to be seen again."⁶⁶ They learned the ways of whites, became crack shots with the whiteman's weapons, and used the white man's tactics of mass and surprise to defeat their opponents at Rosebud Creek and Little Big Horn. War became a way of life and the Indians gradually understood how to defeat the Army. They did not anticipate the whites would continue after such defeats.

The Army did not make any drastic changes in equipment since the Bozeman Trail War and still used Civil War materials. Soldiers disregarded muzzleloaders, but most did not have repeating rifles except those who acquiring them from outside sources. On the other hand, many Indians made the transition from stone-age bow and arrows to repeating rifles. It was evident during the Centennial Campaign that some Indians had better weapons than the Army provided its troops.

During the Centennial Campaign the Army used a variety of arms and ammunition. The cavalry carried the .45 caliber model 1873, Springfield breechloading single shot carbine, using a metal cartridge with fifty-five grains of powder. They also carried .45 caliber Colt single action revolvers but no sabers. The infantry used the same .45 caliber rifle with a longer barrel, called the "long Tom," using the same cartridge with seventy grains of powder. The "long Tom" could fire one thousand yards accurately and the carbine six hundred yards. The Indians knew the accuracy and range of the infantry's weapons and always hesitated to approach their steady fire. When cover was available the infantry never came under serious attack during any engagements of the Centennial Campaign.⁶⁷

The Indians had .44 caliber Winchester model 1866 rifles, .44 caliber sixteen shot Henry rifles, .50 caliber seven shot Spencer carbines, and .52 caliber Springfield rifles. Friendly Snake Indians had .45 caliber Springfield carbines and Crows used .50 caliber Springfields. The Indian Bureau issued most of these rifles for hunting. After the battle over twenty different kinds of cartridges littered the Rosebud battleground.⁶⁸ Soldiers carried cartridges in canvas or leather waistbelts affixed with loops instead of regulation pouches, allowing even weight distribution.

Troops appeared militarily, though permitted personal comfort items on long campaigns. With relaxed dress codes, even leaders would indulge. For example, General Crook dressed in an old hunting jacket, slouch hat, soldier's boots, his beard braided and taped, and often added an enlisted man's coat. Troops wore leftover Civil War four button wool blouses, and woolen baggy trousers. Infantry wore leather boots, soles fastened with brass screws, while cavalry wore model 1872 midcalf boots. Hats varied from prescribed black felt to civilian patterned types.⁶⁹ Soldiers wore heavy underwear, coats lined with blankets, fur caps, and buffalo robes to combat the severe cold.

The campaign trail was harsh with few luxuries, troops took only what they needed. Equipment had to be durable, light, and useful or it was left behind. Crook, known to travel light, experienced difficulties with lack of food, medical services, and ammunition. He left the supply trains behind and would not permit communications with these trains including return of the sick and disabled. Such security measures created severe burdens.⁷⁰

Friendly Indians had problems being distinguished from the enemy, complaining the infantry shot at them. To correct this, the Army issued friendly Indians strips of red cloth to tie around their arms as a means of recognition.⁷¹ Later the enemy discovered the meaning of the red strip and used it to their advantage, entering forts to obtain food, clothing, and ammunition.

Even though the Army had changed its doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment since the Bozeman Trail War, it nevertheless had systemic problems in all four areas. The changes were in the right direction, they were now winning the protracted war with the plains Indians. The Army would take several more years before ending the Indian problems. Looking at the successes and failures from these

lessons learned helped the Army change. Study of these transitions could possibly assist leaders going through similar situations today and in the future.

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²⁴Dr. William Glenn Robertson, Dr. Jerold Brown, Major William M. Campsey, and Major Scott R. McMeen, Atlas of the Sioux Wars (Fort Leavenworth Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff Collage, 1993),

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⁴⁴Mills, 409.

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⁴⁶Jerome A. Greene, Slim Buttes, 1876 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), XIII-XIV.

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⁴⁹Jerome A. Greene, Battles and Skirmishes of the Great Sioux War 1876-1877: The Military View (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 96.

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⁶⁰Ibid., IX-X.

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⁶⁴Ibid., 166.

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⁶⁶Mills, 406.

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CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

The Army's next adversary may very well be much like the Plains Indians. The Army cannot expect the enemy to flee at the mere sight of the American flag. This study evaluates in the terms of doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment why this is true. Its purpose was to ascertain why the Army could not defeat a small and poorly armed foe. Concurrently, I intended to explore lessons which potentially apply to improving a modern Army challenged with an extensive variety of problems. It also evaluates the historical significant consequences if America approaches the next conflict with an inflated ego while not properly preparing its Army to fight. The Indian Wars ended in numerous American defeats and became a protracted, lengthy struggle. After researching the systemic problems within the post-Civil War Army and the forces affecting their mission accomplishment, a single cause could not be determined. The doctrine, leadership, training, and equipment all played roles in causing military upheaval, some more than others. The Army cannot afford to make these mistakes again.

During the Indian Wars the Army did not change its warfighting policies. It did begin to develop what could be considered doctrine during this time. Officers used unwritten fundamental truths when fighting the Indians. They believed Indians would not fight against organized forces and always flee; second, they would not enter a conflict with the Army unless in the proximity of their village; and third, Indians would not fight during the winter unless for survival.¹

At the beginning of the Indian Wars the Army fought as they had in the Civil War, emplacing forts, sending out patrols, and using force on force. These tactics did not work against Indians who did not fight the same way. Indians used hit and run tactics. This led to the acceptance of the fundamental truths previously mentioned. Until the end of the Centennial Campaign these fundamentals worked. Campaigns against Indians were seldom more than a few pitted battles, ending with units chasing after a few Indians. Then during the last part of the Centennial Campaign the Indians changed to attacking in large numbers, using modern weapons and tactics, surrounding and cutting off the enemy. Their change in warfare surprised Army leaders and necessitated a re-evaluation of both friendly and enemy warfighting methodology.

The Army took too long to understand that these fundamentals of unwritten doctrine were incorrect. They, also, failed to publish any changes to the doctrine or any lessons learned allowing for the development of a new doctrine. Nowhere were their fundamentals taught and leaders had to learn by doing or following other experienced leaders. Commanders further failed to identify changes to the enemy's fighting methods, and consequently, did not adopt tactical countermeasures. This failing cost lives. After the leaders developed and promulgated their unwritten doctrine there was temporary success until the Indians modified their techniques at the end of the Centennial Campaign. Hence, doctrine played only a minor role in the Army's inability to end the war quickly. Nevertheless, it should have been published for future leaders and taught in leadership schools.

Today's leaders may study these systemic problems and extract meaningful insights while finding practical application for today's Army. The bottom line is doctrine during post-Civil War had not changed since the war. It was outdated and did not fit with the smaller, more

mobile forces needed to battle with the Sioux. Forces were still infantry making a necessary change to cavalry. These changes affected other areas within the Army.

Leadership throughout the Indian Wars proved to be one of the major problems. Leader failures resulted in prolonging these wars over three decades. Most critical events from the Fetterman Massacre to Crook's defeat can be directly related to commanders and their failures. Many problems could have been avoided had senior leadership from the top in Washington, down to the combat leaders on the ground, been more focused on the enemy and environmental situation.

During the post-war draw-down the Army could keep key leaders and release those not needed. Although Army headquarters maintained key officers, most noncommissioned officers left with the majority of soldiers. Those who had something to return to did so, leaving others who had nothing or could not handle civilian life. Many remaining soldiers were not the kind of personnel needed to fight Indians.

The leadership in Washington did not foresee Indians being such a problem. It planned to employ the Army to settle the West by constructing sawmills, building roads, and showing settlers how to grow crops in the harsh environment. Post-Civil War soldiers saw their mission as one of protecting the routes and those who traveled them.

As the Indian Wars wore on it became apparent something needed to change. At the beginning leaders who changed their style of fighting were accused of using unorthodox ways over true Army fighting methods. This attitude soon disappeared when the Indians, who did not adhere to chivalry, forced a change in their style of warfare. Some commanders did not change, like Captains Fetterman and Brown, and created a stir in the East with voters. Seeking greater military leadership the voters elected President Grant.

Previously, the military did not deal with Indians, only Indian agents did. After Grant entered office he transferred responsibility for Indians to the Army. Until this time Army leaders did not feel the government had a grasp of the situation, with Indian agents and traders taking advantage of Indians.

Grant overhauled the chain of command from the top down. He brought in some of the best Indian fighters, such as General Crook, known for his Civil War and Southern battles against the Arrapahoes, in addition to General Terry and Lieutenant Colonel Custer. Grant saw the Indian agents were not controlling the situation and in some cases exacerbated it. The discovery of gold and inability to control white settlers further pushed Grant to bring closure to the Indian problems. He had the Head of the Department of Interior order the Indians onto reservations. When the Indians did not comply, Grant gave the Army the mission of settling the Indian problems. He believed the Army was the quickest and easiest way to accomplish this. Prior to this, the Army was to track and kill only renegades to eliminate the problem. Now the Army had to pursue all Indians.

Once tasked, Army leaders did not have objections regarding their mission. They would now deal directly with the Indians. Again, however, changing missions along with confusion about who controlled Indians lengthened the conflict.

These Army leaders assumed control and developed the Centennial Campaign, a three pronged attack, striking the Indians while gathered for the winter. But, they failed to understand the Indians and how they changed. Custer, like Crook, held the Indians in contempt. Both did not respect the Indians fighting qualities and suffered defeats from their misjudgments.

The Indians, observing the build-up of forces, made plans of their own. They gathered their allies, purchased modern repeating rifles, and prepared for war. Many of the chiefs thought they could not win, but decided fighting was better than dying of starvation. Each day they held out was another day of being free. Thus, larger tribes began violent raids to eradicate whites from their former lands. They attacked as the whites did, in large numbers, using modern weapons and tactics, surrounding and cutting off the enemy. The Indians were very successful during most of the Centennial Campaign using these tactics.

Crook, known for his earlier Indian battles, thought all Indians were alike. He did not listen to his subordinates about the Indians or matters of his command. He drove his command until completely exhausted and failed to use scouts and subordinates appropriately. He had to court-martial several of his junior leaders. Newspapers, as well as subordinates, questioned his abilities. His failure to understand his personnel and enemy capabilities cost many lives. During the Battle of Rosebud he was driven back and forced to abandon the linkup with General Terry's forces. A mistake which possibly could have averted the Custer disaster.

One key thing learned from this was that the Army eventually saw a problem in its leader's performance. This started the training of troops at Fort Leavenworth. Soldiers and officers came to Leavenworth to learn to ride and fight on horseback. Officers completed training which later became what is known today as the Command and General Staff College.

Today's leaders will find that the problem of being inflexible in the tactics used in a different environment is one that is still pertinent. The leaders constantly underestimated their enemy, causing them to be defeated in several battles. One of the problems of today is

our military is convinced that there is no one in the world that can match our military. The leaders of the Indian Wars thought the same thing.

The Army had systemic problem in training that it was never able to overcome during this period. They failed to comprehend the problems within the type of training being given to soldiers and officers. Most of the officers at the unit level even failed to recognize that the training was incorrect. They were training soldiers to fight a conventional war at a time when they had to fight a completely different type enemy that used guerrilla tactics.

During the Civil War, the Army trained mainly for force on force dismounted warfare, with an Army that was mostly infantry. The terrain and enemy required a change in training for the Indian Wars. The Army had to train their officers and soldiers to ride and think like its new adversary. This was a challenge because after the Civil War there were no real Indian experts within the Army. The Civil War veterans were difficult to retrain because they thought that they knew how to fight anyone, anywhere.

New recruits arrived unable to ride or shoot. Their additional duties of building forts, delivering mail, and planting crops did not allow time for training in basic soldiering skills. There was no train-up time allotted for new soldiers. A shortage of ammunition and horses, along with the poor state of weapons, further exacerbated training problems.

Compounding these problems was the constant shortage of personnel. The personnel management system could not get people to enlist or volunteer for duty in the West. The losses the Army was

incurring from sickness and Indian attacks were greater than the replacements being received. Additionally, a high desertion rate for all units created a critical shortage of personnel, leaving barely enough to defend themselves. In addition, the majority of soldiers were waiting for their enlistment to expire and return home.

Commanders often engaged their units with the soldiers not fully realizing what to expect from the Indians. Without training for the conditions of combat, soldiers did not respond as expected. This led to the problem of not knowing what the unit's strengths and weaknesses were until after combat. Most officers surmised they could defeat the Indians with small unit tactics, considering the Army's recent success and the Indians' small and poorly armed situation. The Officer Corps was ignorant about the new enemy and the type of warfare he practiced.

Senior leaders did not believe that there was any requirement for patrolling skills. They felt that the situation could be controlled with forts along the trails. These forts would escort wagon trains, set up towns, mills, and starting farms. As the Army learned, it could not control the situation from forts, it concluded units required training on effective patrolling.

When Grant became President, he realized soldiers needed better individual preparation and collective training. He ensured the Army in the West had more equipment, ammunition, and men. Although soldiers still arrived untrained, as a result of new policies, they now learned through on-the-job training. During the summer, units deployed on long campaigns resulting in soldiers learning on the job. While during the

winter, they received limited training and prepared for the next campaign, by spending most of their time repairing equipment. Unfortunately, the training during the winter focused on marksmanship and drilling with horses and not on how to fight the Indians.

On the other hand, the Indians everyday life style trained him in the basics for fighting on the Plains. He developed advanced horsemanship and weaponry skills as a child. Their culture placed high value on bravery and effectiveness on combat skills. They were not ready to fight large force battles during the Bozeman Trail Campaigns, but they quickly learned from the Army. They incorporated the skills of mass and surprise into leadership training and taught the braves how to perform as part of a large force.

The Indian Wars displayed the need to train officers before placing them in units. Thus, the Army formed the precursor to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Senior Commanders finally recognized that with proper leader training fewer mistakes would have occurred, ending the Indian Wars much sooner.

Early on during the Indian Wars the Army experienced severe problems with its equipment. It had neither enough nor proper types of equipment for this new adversary who lived in difficult terrain. The lack of funding by Congress for the War Department and an inflexible procurement system led to soldiers having to make do with what was available. The equipment that they did have was not bought to fight in the much colder temperatures that existed in the northern plains. Also, it was varied in type and manufacturer causing problems in commonality and interoperability.

The weather was harsh during the winters, creating problems with thinly made clothing and boots. The socks they issued were of a coarse wool that rubbed blisters on the infantry's feet during the summer. Commanders had relaxed uniform standards on campaigns in order for the soldiers to survive. Most took buffalo robes, fur caps, and lined their coats with blankets to combat the western cold. Accepting responsibility to give soldiers the proper equipment and uniforms fixed a problem which severely hampered performance during early campaigns.

Further, they did not have proper weapons. New cavalry soldiers constantly arrived with muzzle-loaders, a rifle intended for the infantry. Armorers could not fix the vast variety of weapons found in their organizations and could not stock enough repair parts. The mixture of weapons created a logistical problem with so many different caliber's and bullets being used. Over twenty different caliber bullets were discovered after one battle. The Army was still not issuing repeating weapons; the Army Ordnance Department rejected repeating weapons on the grounds that they would use too much ammunition.² This became a problem because the Indians selected repeating rifles as their weapon of choice. During later battles of the Centennial Campaign it became very apparent Indians had better weapons than soldiers.

Another problem was never enough horses for the requirements of the fort. The horses were over used delivering mail, escorting dignitaries and other jobs not directly related to the Indian campaigns. This caused the horses to be depleted much faster than the procurement system could replace them. Then there was always the problem with the Indians stealing them. These problems, along with the lame and sick horses constantly left the forts in a need for more horses.

The Army discovered it needed light equipment to travel quickly. If it was not light or useful, leaders frequently left it behind. The cannon and Gatlin gun fell into this category, both needed too much logistical support and training to be effective consequently, leaders did not deploy them.

This lack of supplies and equipment cost the Army in lives but the War Department could not get the funding required to correct the problem. This, with the lack of understanding of requirements by the procurement side, placed undue hardships on leaders and soldiers.

The Army's failure in doctrine was the base for its failure in the Bozeman Trail and Centennial Campaigns. The doctrine was wrong and the leadership failed to realize it, stubbornly holding to tactics and procedures that did not work. On one side, this caused the training to be inadequate and focused on the wrong tenants. Additionally, it caused the Army to constantly provide the wrong equipment.

There are several lessons learned today's Army leaders can obtain from these campaigns. These campaigns came after the Army had won a major war, validating its doctrine as current and correct. They were going through a period of down-sizing when Congress would not fund any major equipment changes. They were fighting an enemy with inferior technical capabilities, but was able to gain access to this technology.

We must remember that doctrine must be flexible enough to handle a variety of changes at the same time. The leadership must be able to recognize when doctrine is not working for the circumstances they are in and be willing to change the training and tactics for their equipment. It was not until the Army leadership changed the tactical basis of their doctrine that they became successful in the Indian Wars.

Today the Army is down-sizing and experiencing several budget shortfalls combined with a vague threat. There is also an increased emphasis on technology. However, without adequate intelligence, none of the aforementioned categories will obtain the goal of going to war and winning. Americans expect its Army to be victorious and do so with the least cost of lives and equipment. They also expect mission accomplishment in a short period of time. If the Army does not do this, the American people will not support the conflict.

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